

Religious Authority Online in the Diocese of York

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Abstract

My aim in this dissertation is to research who the online authorities are in the Diocese of York, whether they have roles of authority in the offline church, whether these online roles are considered important by people in the offline church, and whether the online spaces managed by these people are part of wider mission and ministry.

In this dissertation, I investigate these topics by collecting qualitative data from some of these people via an online survey and a focus group.

I argue that many of the people who are authorities online do have positions of authority in the offline church, and are part of its hierarchy and structure, but that this authority does not necessarily extend online.

I argue that there is often a real disconnection between a church's offline mission and ministry, and the role of the church's online spaces. This is partly due to conflicting understandings of the purpose or role of online spaces, and partly due to the fact that they are simply not seen as important.

Finally, I argue that validation of authority is crucial to both our understanding of the attributes of religious authority online, and to the effectiveness of the mission and ministry online, both from people in the offline church and for the online religious authority themselves.

Declaration and word count

The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

Eleanor Cane

Word count: 20,887.

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Introduction

I am the Communications Officer for the Church of England in the Diocese of York. Part of my role is to encourage and enable churches to share their stories with people in a variety of ways, including via the media of websites and social media sites. When I began the job in 2009 a few churches had websites, but Facebook pages and Twitter feeds for churches were virtually unheard of. Now, I estimate 150 churches, parishes or benefices in the Diocese have websites, 100 have Facebook pages, and 40 have Twitter feeds.

There is no national Church of England or Diocesan policy that instructs churches to, or how to, engage online. Each church decides whether to, and how to, communicate in online spaces. Consequently, there is huge variety in how churches engage with online spaces, with huge disparity in the success of their endeavours. An example of a church which is using Facebook well is St Peter's, Redcar. The page has been live now for three months, gathering nearly 200 followers in that short time. They share pictures from services, invite people to forthcoming events and services, and ask people to pray. Their pictures and posts have up to 20 shares or likes, and one person shared the following about a funeral on their page: "I would like to thank Rachel the amazing vicar for sending our Mam off in a style fitting for her. A beautiful service with just the right balance. Our family took comfort from your words at this very sad time. Thank you so much for helping us through the process. Without you we certainly wouldn't have coped. Lot's of love and respect". At the other end of the spectrum, St Nicholas', Dunnington, has been on Twitter since 2013, has 14 followers, and has only tweeted once.

Despite the great disparity in how effectively these spaces are used, there are four different online spaces which are most commonly engaged with: entries on the national Church of England website www.achurchnearyou.co.uk (ACNY), a church's own website, Facebook and Twitter. Churches may engage with one of these online spaces but not the others. Some of these sites may be managed by clergy, some by lay people, and some by people who have little relationship to the offline church. Equally, there is great variation in terms of theological literacy or media literacy, in the skills possessed by those who manage these spaces. Some churches may see their online spaces as integral to the mission and ministry of the church, some may see them as superfluous, and some may view them in a more hostile manner.

Alongside my role as Communications Officer, I am also studying for this MA in Theology, Media and Communication. One of the major themes that had emerged from my learning is the importance of digital religion in the 21st century. The growth of information communication technology and computer-mediated communication has meant that the internet has become a dominant space worldwide. This 'digital reformation' has affected economics, politics and also religion. As our society becomes more and more networked, the impact of the internet cannot be overlooked in any study of religion. Even in the Diocese of York, churches' online presence is often much greater than their offline presence: Holy Trinity, Hull, has 3,320 followers on Twitter, but fewer than a tenth of those people in church on an average Sunday.

As Communication Officer, I might be considered to be an expert in the area of online communication in the Diocese of York, but because we have so many churches, each engaged online in different ways, I sometimes know very little about

what happens in different situations. For this dissertation, I want to investigate who the people are who manage the online spaces for the Diocese's churches. An understanding of religious authority online is crucial to how churches interact with people in the context of digital religion. If churches' online presence is potentially more influential than their offline presence, both the academy and the Church of England need to understand who these online authorities are, and whether these online spaces are part of the church's wider mission and ministry, or if they act in a different sphere. There has been no research on these subjects in an English Anglican context, so my research will add to the literature for both the academy and for the Church of England.

In this dissertation, I will research whether people who mediate online spaces and communities for churches have authority within their church contexts, offline and online. I will ask whether they are able to make their online spaces part of the mission and ministry of their church. To give my research focus and boundaries, I am looking at the churches in the Diocese of York. The Diocese of York is the Church of England between the rivers Humber and Tees, and the A1 and the East coast. There are 600 churches in this area, organised into 472 parishes and 225 benefices.

In order to study religious authority online, I must first establish what is meant by authority. Max Weber (1962) described authority as that which enables commands to be obeyed by others, and categorised authority as falling into one of three types: legal, traditional or charismatic. This is authority as a state of being, or a possession

of power, which Weber defined as the ability of people or groups to achieve their goals despite opposition from others.

Pauline Hope Cheong (2013) gives us another way of understanding authority, as “performative and discursive, involving persuasive claims by leaders to elicit an audience’s attention, respect, and trust”. This understanding of authority is dynamic, and constantly being made and re-made.

I would also like to add a third understanding of authority: the possession of knowledge, skills or ability. The word authority carries the two distinct connotations of power and knowledge, and it is vital that this element of ability or understanding is brought into our examinations of religious authority online. When people are engaging in online spaces, they need the technical and media skills to be able to set up or maintain a website, Facebook page or Twitter feed. Religious authorities in these online spaces should also have the theological or missiological knowledge to be able to give these spaces a distinctly Christian mission and ministry.

My research sits within three theories and frameworks in the studies of religious authority online: Heidi Campbell’s (2010) religious-social shaping of technology, Campbell’s (2007b) multiple layers of authority, and Cheong’s (2013) dual logics and dialectical perspective. I will argue that, with regards to Campbells’s four layers of authority (hierarchy, structure, belief and text), in a British Anglican context, hierarchy and structure are more important than belief and text. I argue that many of the people who are authorities online do have positions of authority in the offline church, and are part of its hierarchy and structure, but that this authority does not necessarily extend online.

I will argue that there is often a real disconnection between a church's offline mission and ministry, and the role of that church's online spaces. This is partly due to conflicting understandings of the purpose or role of online spaces, and partly due to the fact that they are simply not seen as important.

I will argue that validation of authority is crucial to both our understanding of the attributes of religious authority online, and the effectiveness of mission and ministry online, both from people in the offline church, and for the online religious authority themselves. Members of the offline church recognise the skills and knowledge of their religious authorities online, so the managers of these online spaces are seen as authorities in terms of ability. But if the online space is not recognised as important, members of the offline church will not recognise their authority in the sense of power or influence. If the online spaces are not linked to the offline church, the role of authority online does not extend to the offline church. The managers of online spaces see themselves as authorities in terms of technical knowledge, but are less likely to see themselves as authorities in how to use the online spaces as part of the wider church's mission and ministry, or as authorities in the sense of having power or influence in the offline church.

My research will enable the Diocese of York (and the 41 other Dioceses of the Church of England) to understand who their religious authorities online are, and to better equip those people for their roles. I will argue that the authorities online are just as important as the authorities in offline churches, and should be trained and equipped accordingly.

In the following chapters I will examine the academic literature surrounding religious authority online, and explain the methodology of my qualitative research. I will discuss the results of my survey and focus group, and summarise my conclusions and recommendations for future work and research.

Literature Review

In my review of the academic literature on religious authority online I will be primarily focussing on specific topics rather than on periods of research. This is partly because I want the literature to speak directly to my research questions, but also because the field of research on digital religion is relatively new. There are few authors working extensively in the field, and their research is relatively limited. When Heidi Campbell came to examine the field in 2007, she found “studies on religious authority online have been few, compared to studies on religious community and identity... there is a lack of definitional clarity over authority online, and no comprehensive theory of religious authority” (Campbell, 2007b).

Context of research

In her paper “Who’s got the power? Religious authority and the Internet” (2007), Campbell gives a useful overview of research to that date on religious authority online. She notes that much of the research into authority has focussed around New Religious Movements (NRMs), citing Dawson’s (2000) study of cults online, Berger and Ezzy’s (2004) research into Pagans online, and Barker’s (2005) study of NRMs online. She summarises that much of the research makes “claims about the connection between online and offline religion [which] have often referred to—or inferred that—issues of power, authority, and control were areas of concern for religious groups, claiming that online practices inevitably challenge traditional religion both in belief and practice”. Religious authority online has been seen as a place of tension between traditional and new practices. Campbell also highlights the

newness of the field, noting that the first real study of religious authority online was Dawson in 2007.

Since her 2007 review of the literature, Campbell has dominated the field of research into religious authority online. Another important scholar is Pauline Hope Cheong, who sits within and develops Campbell's theories. My work sits within the context of both Campbell's and Cheong's research, and I will critically reflect on their frameworks and theories below.

Frameworks and theories

My research sits within three theories and frameworks in the studies of religious authority online: Campbell's (2010) religious-social shaping of technology, Campbell's (2007b) multiple layers of authority, and Cheong's (2013) dual logics and dialectical perspective.

In her book "Religion, Media and Culture: When Religion meets new media" Campbell (2010) identifies religious-social shaping of technology (RSST) as a key concept in our understanding of how churches use new media. She identifies four core areas that make up RSST: the history and tradition of a given religious community in relation to its media use, the core beliefs and patterns related to media, the specific negotiation processes it undergoes with a new technology, and the communal framing and discourses created to define and justify their technology use. She notes that "paying attention to whom or what provides the basis for the community's authority is vital, as it indicates the behavioral boundary lines of that community and by whom they are drawn". Campbell's concept of RSST is vital for

research in digital religion: she reminds us that the online is not divorced from the offline. Churches' online spaces do not sit in a vacuum, but proceed from a history of interaction with other media. This can be clearly illustrated with groups such as the Mormons, who explicitly teach their members how to engage critically with the media (Stout & Scott 2003).

In my context within the Diocese of York, I have encountered no specific teaching or set of beliefs with regards to media consumption that could lead to explicit understandings on digital media, although these churches have undoubtedly inherited the Protestant love of the printed word passed down from the Reformation. But that in itself is telling: without a clear understanding of how the church 'should' interact with media or new technology, these churches will lack a coherent understanding of how to engage with online spaces. This is shown in my observations in the introduction: there is a huge variation in how churches in the Diocese of York engage with online spaces, and what spaces they use.

Campbell (2007b) also provides us with a framework for identifying and refining the attributes of authority at play online, in her paper "Who's got the power? Religious authority and the Internet". She identifies four layers at play: hierarchy or religious roles, structure or systems, ideology or beliefs, and text or sources. As churches interact with digital spaces, Campbell argues that researchers need to identify what specific form or type of authority is being affected:

"Is it the power position of traditional religious leaders? Is it the established systems by which policy decisions are made and information is passed on to community members? Is it the corporate ideology of the community? Or is it the role and interpretation of official religious rhetoric and teaching?"

Campbell is predominantly working from a US context, and there are perhaps aspects of American religion which inform her research which may not be as relevant in an English Anglican context. For example, Campbell (2007a) argues that “groups with more conservative or literalist interpretations of their sacred texts and a high reliance on recognized religious authorities to dictate those interpretations often have a stricter understanding of communal boundaries than others”. Groups with such conservative interpretations of religious texts are relatively rare within the Diocese of York: I can only think of half a dozen churches that would teach that the Bible is inerrant. More common, perhaps, are traditional Anglo-Catholic churches which have a “high reliance on recognized religious authorities”, namely their clergy. Campbell’s framing of these layers of authority gives us a strong, nuanced framework to examine theories, but one which perhaps needs adaptation for an English Anglican context.

The third theory that has framed my research into religious authority online has been provided by Cheong (2013) in her chapter on authority in Campbell’s book on Digital Religion. Cheong offers us the concept of dual logics and a dialectical perspective on authority. She uses Campbell’s four layers of religious authority online (described above), but nuances this even further, writing that

“Authority is performative and discursive, involving persuasive claims by leaders to elicit an audience’s attention, respect, and trust. Religious authority thus can be approached as an order and quality of communication, which in a media age is media-derived and dynamically constructed”.

I agree with Cheong that authority is emergent and works itself out in interactions between people. Authority is constantly being reinvented. This definition is crucial if

we are to understand authority in the context of a changing world, as traditional church structures enter the world of networked, fluid, emerging online communities.

Cheong goes on to write:

“The Internet facilitates both the weakening and strengthening of religious authority, offering possibilities for conflict, yet also understanding and accommodation. This insight into the dual logics prompts further understanding of a dialectical perspective in mediated culture [which] recognises the two interacting forces, seemingly opposite, interdependent, and complementary, akin to Eastern philosophies (such as yin and yang) on the completion of relative polarities. Here, the logic of dialectics on religious authority would imply understanding the management of conflicting tensions, uneven gains, multiple opportunities, ambivalences, and challenges that new media users like religious leaders face within their online and offline experiences”.

This engagement with the tensions around authority resonates with my experience with churches in the Diocese of York, as traditional churches try to engage in a new media world. There are indeed uneven gains – one church can have 600 followers on Facebook, and another only 6.

However, I would have liked Cheong to tease out the identity of these authorities here. She seems to be assuming that the people who manage online spaces are already leaders in the offline church, and are negotiating authority in a new sphere. She sees this as a way these leaders can regain legitimacy in other spheres, writing that “active and accommodative practices by some clergy, related to their engagement with digital media, may enable them to regain the legitimacy and trust necessary to operate in the religious sphere”. There is a further dimension here, of people who are not already leaders in the offline church. How do the people who manage online spaces negotiate “conflicting tensions, uneven gains, multiple

opportunities, ambivalences, and challenges” within the church, if they do not already hold positions of leadership there?

I will argue that both clergy and laity act as religious authorities online, and that Campbell's categories of hierarchy and structure in the offline church are vital to that negotiation. I will also argue that I, in my role as Communications Officer, can help the religious authorities online in the Diocese of York negotiate those tensions and challenges.

Rejected theories

I have chosen not to use Barzilai-Nahon's (2008) theory of network gatekeeping to frame my research. She proposes,

“a theory of network gatekeeping comprised of two components: identification and salience.... Network gatekeeping salience proposes identifying the gated and their salience to gatekeepers by four attributes: (a) their political power in relation to the gatekeeper, (b) their information production ability, (c) their relationship with the gatekeeper, and (d) their alternatives in the context of gatekeeping”.

Although I agree with her findings, I felt they focused much more on the attributes of the gated than the gatekeepers. Her network gatekeeping theory looks at the gated's possession of four attributes: political power, information production, relationship and alternatives. She also creates a theory of the gated based on attributes which they do or not possess, to create such types as “exploited user”, “illusive apprentice”, “threatening gated” and “vagabond reader”. However, her typology is less nuanced on the types of gatekeeper, and sums up authorities as either “government level”, “industry regulator”, “internal authority”, or “individual”. My research is more concerned with the types of individual who could be authorities in online spaces and their evaluation of themselves as authorities. I am more

interested in the relationship between on and offline authority, rather than the gated and the gatekeeper. The constraints of this dissertation mean I do not have the space to draw my findings into the theory of network gatekeeping, although that could perhaps be a topic for research in the future.

Gaps in knowledge

The majority of research into religious authority online has been in an American context: Barker (2005) researched New Religious Movements in the USA, Knowles (2013) looked at the American-based Rapture Ready website, and Shimmel (2011) examined blogging as a way of challenging authority in an American Jewish context. The research is not exclusively US based: Barzilai-Nahon (2008) focussed on ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, Cheong, Huang and Poon (2011) looked at church leaders and webmasters in Singapore, Teusner (2013) has researched Australian emerging church blogs, and Lomborg and Ess (2012) looked at a Danish church on Facebook. However, I can find no real research into religious authority online in a British context, let alone a British Anglican context. There are distinctive elements to religion in Britain which merit specific research in this context: religion in Britain is experiencing a rise in the public sphere, set against a decline in numbers (Graham 2013). This unusual situation sets Britain apart from the US, the rest of Europe and Australia. If we accept Cheong's understanding that religious authority online involves embracing "conflicting tensions, uneven gains, multiple opportunities, ambivalences, and challenges", it is crucial to examine this understanding in the unique context of Britain in 2015.

Although Campbell and Cheong have done a great deal to bring definitional clarity to theories of religious authority online, more needs to be done to nuance and add to these theories. Campbell's religious-social shaping of technology and multiple layers of authority, and Cheong's dual logics and dialectical perspective do not always examine locations of authority, or the identities of authorities. There is sometimes conflation between authority online and offline, and this needs unpacking. I will argue that many of the people who manage online spaces for churches in the Diocese of York do have positions of authority in the offline church, and are part of its hierarchy and structure, but that this authority does not necessarily extend online. These people, who are authorities in one space do not always find that their authority transfers to another space.

There is an unfortunate assumption in some research about the roles of religious authorities online, that clergy are often assumed to be authorities off- and online. In her otherwise excellent chapter on authority, Cheong assumes that clergy are the church representatives engaging online. In some research, lay authority online is often posed in opposition to 'traditional' clergy authority offline, as in Teusner and Campbell's studies of bloggers. I will argue that this is a simplification of both the nature of clergy and laity authority in on- and offline spaces, and that more nuanced research needs to be done to explore the attribute of the identification of authority. I will argue that laity and clergy within the Diocese of York have similar roles online, with often similar experiences.

Similarly, there is little research exploring whether the people who manage online spaces consider themselves to be authorities. Campbells's four layers locate

authority in a church's attitudes to hierarchy, structure, ideology and text, but do not take into account people's attitudes to their own authority. Cheong's understanding of the "management of conflicting tensions" is important, but also needs to be examined in relation to the internal tensions of the person in question; do they feel they are an authority in the church? Authority cannot be assumed to be present merely because others bestow it on someone; a person's conception of their own authority is bound to affect their actions. I will argue that this 'ownership' of authority relates back to and intermingles with Campbell's four other layers of authority, especially those of hierarchy and structure. A PCC or committee can decide to vest authority in a lay person, even though that lay person may not feel they are an authority on a subject. In turn, a person may feel they are an authority on a particular issue, but their PCC or congregation may not recognise them as such. I will argue that the validation of authority is an important element: both from people in the offline church and self-validation from the online religious authority themselves.

This takes us to another gap in the literature on religious authority online. The word authority is often used to recognise status: a clergy person is an authority in their church. But the word, of course, also carries connotations of ability and knowledge as well as status. A lay person might know a great deal about the history of church services, and be an authority on the liturgy, even if they do not have the status of authority in a church. This sense of ability, expertise or knowledge is not examined in the field of literature, and I argue that this is another crucial layer in our understanding of authority.

Summary

The field of literature, although limited due to its newness, offers in Campbell and Cheong's work, strong definitions of the issues at play when looking at religious authority online. Campbell reminds us to look to the history of a church's interaction with media and technologies to understand how that church will interact with new media and technologies. She also gives us a good framework in which to research authority, looking at hierarchy, structure, ideology, and text. Cheong encourages us to think of the tensions at work in emergent authority.

The academic literature on religious authority online provides me with theories and frameworks to enable my research to take place. However, my own research is necessary, as the literature does not answer the questions I have about who the online authorities are in the Diocese of York: whether they are clergy or lay people and whether they have roles of authority in the offline church. I will use Cheong and Campbell's theories and frameworks to research whether these online roles are considered important by people in the offline church, and whether the online spaces managed by these people are part of the wider mission and ministry of churches in the Diocese. I will research whether these online religious authorities have the theological and media literacy to make their online spaces part of the mission and ministry of the church.

In my next chapter I will explain the methodology I used to research these issues.

Methodology

In the following chapter, I will explain my methodological approach and my research methods. My methodological approach is informed by the importance of self-reporting narratives, mutual collaboration, and self-reflexive practice. My research methods include the capture of qualitative data by an online survey and a focus group.

Previous research

I have identified five main methodologies used in previous research to collect data on religious authority online: content analysis, participant observation, online surveys, interviews, and the use of existing data.

First is content analysis: looking at the content of a website, forum or app to examine attitudes to authority. Steve Knowles used content analysis to build on Karine Barzilai-Nahon's network gatekeeping theory, researching the fundamentalist Christian website Rapture Ready (Knowles 2013). Tim Hutchings's research into religious authority online involved researching the ways in which the Bible app YouVersion "may be changing relationships between readers of the Bible, their pastors and the Christian publishing industry". Hutchings (2014) also engaged in content analysis, exploring the structure of YouVersion and analysing YouVersion's own online and print publications.

The second methodology is participant observation. Although not studying specifically religious authority online, Blanchard and Marcus's (2004) study of the sense of virtual community was an early attempt to research online authority. Via an

intensive study of a Multiple Sport Newsgroup, they engaged in participant observation and member interviews to collect data, finding that online authorities were vital in the creation of online community. In his research on Rapture Ready, Knowles also engaged in participant observation, analysing the interactions of people on the website's forums.

Solomon Shimmel (2001) researched how bloggers challenge religious authority, focussing on Orthodox Jews in the USA. He undertook his research primarily using participant observation, by "following at least ten blogs over a period of two to three years, primarily as a silent observer but occasionally posting comments on some of them or submitting a guest post upon the invitation of the blog owner". Paul Emerson Teusner (2012) also looked at religious authority and blogs, this time researching "20 bloggers from a variety of Protestant and Evangelical faith traditions in Australia". Teusner used the blog search engine Technorati "to identify bloggers associated with the tags 'emerging church', 'emergent church' and 'postmodern church'".

The third method of data collection is the online survey. This seems a very straightforward method of gathering data, and I was surprised to find only one person using this method. In his examination of YouVersion mentioned above, Hutchings gathered data via a twelve-question online survey and conducted follow-up interviews with a smaller number of people.

The fourth methodology I found used is, not surprisingly, interviews. As well as Hutchings, Knowles, Blanchard and Marcus also interviewed people, focusing their

research on forum participants. Campbell's (2007b) research into online religious authority involved "three sets of interviews with members of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian faith communities". She used a thematic qualitative analysis to study the data:

"Each set of interviews was coded for instances when interviewees commented on the following: the influence of the Internet on religious hierarchy (roles or perceptions of recognized religious or community leaders), religious structures (community structures, patterns of practice, or official organizations), religious ideology (commonly held beliefs, ideas of faith, or shared identity) or religious texts (recognized teachings or official religious books such as the Koran, Torah, or Bible) ".

Cheong, Huang and Poon's (2011) research into religious communication and authority online also drew from "interviews with 29 Protestant pastors in Singapore from 26 churches (in 3 churches, two leaders were interviewed) ". Crucially, they prioritised self-reporting narratives, writing that, "as we seek to understand self-perceptions, the use of self-reporting narratives serves to enhance our understanding of personal and cultural experiences because meanings of the self and of events are located within specific cultures and times". They then engaged in a "thematic analysis of the interviews... using constant comparative methodology, involving a grounded theory approach where a detailed line-by-line analysis (was used) to generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships among categories is used".

There has been relatively little research so far into church usage of social media. This is, perhaps, due to a fear that the social media landscape shifts so quickly that such research will quickly lose its relevance. Most of the studies above have focussed on websites, forums and blogs. In this context, Lomborg and Ess's (2012) study of an activist Danish church on Facebook is an exception. Lomborg and Ess

used interviews to generate data, interviewing one of the pastors and the webmaster about the church's use of Facebook. They also engaged in participant observation and content analysis of the page and of the church's other communications channels.

The fifth method I have identified is the use of existing data, coded and extracted using programmed applications. Karine Barzilai-Nahon (2008) used this in her research into the theory of network gatekeeping, looking at the internet use of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. In "Cultured technology: The Internet and religious fundamentalism" she explains that this relied on data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai 2005). This data was "collected via the platform of a virtual community enabler in Israel named Hevre, and includes a rare data set of about 686,000 Israeli Internet users... In this rare data set, [they] were able to identify and analyze the characteristics of about 14,000 ultra-Orthodox surfers", using programmed applications to extract data.

Campbell (2010) also coded categories of data from existing sets in her research on Christian bloggers, examining how these people used their blogs to affirm or challenge religious authority. Campbell randomly selected 100 blogs, 50 from a survey "conducted by Cory Miller of ChurchCommunicationPro.com in January 2007 in collaboration with Rick Warren's Ministry toolbox web site" and 50 from "a Google Blog Search using the term 'Christian Blogger'". She writes,

"Analysis of these blogs involved searching for answers to specific questions and coding categories outlined in the coding booklet", including "demographics; use of religious identifiers or key words (Christian/Christianity, Religion/Religious, Spiritual/Spirituality); identification of religious group affiliation; identification of religious beliefs; connection to other

social/cultural/political affiliations; and motivations for blogging and expression of views related to media/technology”.

All of these are valid and useful ways of collecting data, but in the context of my research, some are more useful than others. The use of existing data sets, where I could code and analyse results would be very helpful, but those existing data sets do not yet exist in a British Anglican setting. As I explained in the literature review, little research has been done in the context in which I am working, so this methodology is not open to me.

It would also be less relevant for me to engage in content analysis and participant observation. I am particularly interested in the experiences of people who are authorities in religious spaces online: do they consider themselves to be authorities, and does their authority extend to or emerge from offline spaces? Content analysis or participant observation simply does not give me the data I need on these topics. The mediators of these online spaces do not write about these issues on their churches' websites, social media pages or entries on A Church Near You. It is very often difficult to ascertain who the webmaster of a site is, or who runs a social media page.

The most relevant, and potentially most fruitful, methodology for me is the direct questioning of the people engaged in online spaces. As I said above, I see online surveys as a simple way to collect data: people can fill in the answers in their own time and location of choice, making it more likely that people will engage with the topic. Hutchings (2014) received 207 replies to his online survey, suggesting it was easy for people to access and complete. The participant is also at a remove from

the researcher, which could mean there is less potential for the researcher to subconsciously influence the results the participant is giving, through body language or tone of voice.

Hutchings also used his online surveys to select a smaller group of people for interviews in person or over the telephone. I will do the same, as direct interviews will allow me to tease out the subjects I wish to understand. I was struck by Cheong, Huang and Poon's (2011) comments about self-reporting narratives: "as we seek to understand self-perceptions, the use of self-reporting narratives serves to enhance our understanding of personal and cultural experiences because meanings of the self and of events are located within specific cultures and times". This seems crucial if I am to understand participants' experiences of being online religious authorities: I must listen to their stories, their specific contexts and locations in order to understand their experiences.

Self-reflexive practice

Laura Finlay (2002) describes the qualitative researcher as one who "influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data". I am aware that as much as I may want to be a passive figure, neutrally understanding what is happening in the parishes, I will shape the outcome of my research. I hope that an awareness of this will enable this influence to be positive, and to do so, I will use Finlay's six elements of self-reflexive research:

1. examining the impact of the position, perspective and presence of the researcher

2. promoting rich insight through examining personal responses and interpersonal dynamics
3. opening up unconscious motivations and implicit biases in the researcher's approach
4. empowering others by opening up a more radical consciousness
5. evaluating the research process, method and outcomes
6. enabling public scrutiny of the integrity of the research through offering a methodological log of research decisions.

I will be evaluating my research process, method and outcomes in this dissertation, and also enabling others to critique the integrity of my research.

Position, perspective and presence

Finlay establishes that a great problem for such a researcher the assumption that they know everything about the topic. In the area of online communication in the Diocese of York, I could be seen as an expert, and yet I am aware that I know very little about what happens in different specific situations. This is primarily because of the vast size of the Diocese, containing 600 churches, with potentially different online communication in each one, with differing hierarchies, structures, beliefs and attitudes to media. I am aware that working so closely to my area of research gives as much potential for obscuring the topic as it does for offering understanding. As I interview people and conduct surveys, I will hold that point in mind to enable me to approach people's responses with a fresh understanding of their situation.

Personal responses and interpersonal dynamics

There are potential interpersonal and relational risks in taking part in the research, due to my dual role as a researcher and Diocesan Communications Officer. The participants will be people who either hold office or are church volunteers in the Diocese of York, and I am an employee of the Diocese of York. As such, I provide support and help to these people in their parish roles. Our relationship is partially that of colleagues, and partly that of volunteers/office holders and support staff.

Participants may experience anxiety that I could use my research to suggest they are unfit to carry out their roles, or that they have too much authority in online spaces. Participants may see me as an authority figure from the Diocese, and either tell me what I want to hear to keep me 'on side', or resent that authority and become oppositional. I may try to see myself as an impartial researcher in these areas, but I cannot change how other people can see me.

I will manage this by explaining, in the invitation letter and at the start of the survey and focus group, that people are encouraged to speak freely, and that their answers will be anonymised. I will explain that I am trying to separate my roles as a researcher and as an employee of the Diocese, and although their answers may reflect on my work or the management of the Diocese, my primary concern is to gather data for research. I will explain that the results of my research will be available publicly, and that I hope my results will call for more support for people undertaking roles of responsibility online. I hope it will help that this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the University, showing that senior academics have assessed the risks in my research. I will manage the relationship,

especially in the context of the focus group, by explaining that all participants are encouraged to speak freely about all issues, and that I will protect their anonymity.

There is a risk that the participants might criticise my current work for the Diocese of York, perhaps indicating that I do not give appropriate training or help in their roles as managers of online spaces. If this were to happen, I would reflect this in my research and feed it back to my line manager.

Unconscious motivations and implicit biases

I am enthusiastic about the potential churches have to use social media spaces as part of their mission and ministry: that is partly why I'm researching the topic. But this very enthusiasm constitutes bias on my part, and I may be researching amongst people who disagree with my biases.

Opening up a more radical consciousness

In order to counter the problem of assuming I know all there is to know about the topic, I will keep listening to the accounts of the people engaging with me in my research. I will offer them the opportunity to critique my findings, and supplement them with their own thoughts. I will be engaging in mutual collaboration, allowing those among whom I am researching to critique my findings and to respond.

Mutual collaboration

Finlay (2002) notes that "research is co-constituted, a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationship. We understand that meanings are

negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story”.

Finlay offers a typology of five variants of reflexivity: “(i) introspection; (ii) intersubjective reflection; (iii) mutual collaboration; (iv) social critique, and (v) discursive deconstruction”. I am engaging in mutually collaborative research, seeing my participants as co-researchers. However, such an approach does not neutralise the potential risks outlined previously. In particular, Finlay warns that while collaborative reflexivity “offers the opportunity to hear, and take into account, multiple voices and conflicting positions... some still challenge an egalitarian rhetoric where it disguises essentially unequal relationships”.

Self-reporting narratives

The most crucial part of mutual collaboration must be prioritising the experiences of the research participants, and allowing them to share their experiences in their own words. As I noted in my literature review, Cheong, Huang and Poon (2011) took this approach in their research into religious communication and authority online. They wrote that “as we seek to understand self-perceptions, the use of self-reporting narratives serves to enhance our understanding of personal and cultural experiences because meanings of the self and of events are located within specific cultures and times”. This resonated strongly with me. As I seek to understand the participants’ own experiences of authority, I am listening to their understandings of their selves and the place of their selves in their communities at this time. I understand authority to be emergent, in that it is constructed and reconstructed over time and in different contexts. As such, I must prioritise my participants’ self-reporting narratives.

Research Methods

I have described above the methodological approach which will inform my research.

I will now set out the research methods I used to test my arguments.

To discover whether people who mediate online spaces and communities have authority within their church contexts, and whether they are able to make their online spaces part of the mission and ministry of their church, I collected qualitative data from some of these people via an online survey and a focus group.

The online survey consisted of the following ten questions and was managed via the online survey tool SurveyMonkey:

1. What is your name?
2. What is the name of your church or benefice?
3. What online presence does your church or benefice have?
4. Which of these spaces do you manage?
5. Do you have a formal role in the church?
6. Have you received any training to equip you for managing an online space on behalf of the church? This could be theological training as a clergy person or Reader, or training on how to use social media spaces.
7. Do you have any experience outside the church in managing an online space which helps you with this role?
8. Would you welcome further teaching or training on managing a church website or social media site?
9. Do you think your church considers your role in managing an online space important? Why do you think this is?

10. Would you be willing to take part in a focus group to explore some of these issues further?

I invited twenty people known to me through my Diocesan role who run church websites, and/or Facebook and Twitter accounts to take part, via an invitation letter, supported by a participant information sheet and a participant consent form. To gain a range of experiences, I asked people from across different locations in the Diocese: seven people from the Archdeaconry of the East Riding, seven people from the Archdeaconry of Cleveland, and five people from the Archdeaconry of York. Of the twenty people, seven were clergy and thirteen were laity.

Following on from that survey, I conducted a focus group with three people who indicated they were willing to take part. The focus group was conducted in a public space: the retreat and conference centre for the Diocese of York. The session lasted 52 minutes and I recorded the audio on my iPhone, transcribing it by hand over the course of the following days. The participants received no payment for taking part in the research, but were reimbursed for travel to the focus group at the rate of £0.45 a mile. Half of this reimbursement was funded by the Diocese of York, as part of the Diocese's commitment to enabling my research; I funded the other half. I asked the following questions in the focus group¹:

¹ The questions as described overleaf are paraphrased. Some were repeated to different participants in slightly different ways, and some supplementary questions were asked for clarification. The full transcript is in Appendix 3.

1. Please could you remind me and each other what your church has in terms of an online presence, and what it is that you do within that.
2. Does anybody else manage those sites in conjunction with you?
3. What do you see as the role of church websites and social media sites?
4. What do you actually do as the manager of these sites? What's the pattern of posting?
5. What do you think the relationships are between the online church presence and the offline church? Do you think these are aligned?
6. Do you feel you have an authority or influence in your online spaces?
7. Do you think there's a difference in authority as experienced by clergy and by laity?
8. Would you consider yourself to have a role of authority in the church in general, separate from the online spaces?
9. Within your roles of influence, both on and offline, do you think that your authority and influence is respected by the church? Why?
10. Do you feel as though the role you have online is as valued and supported as some of your other work?
11. Do you feel you have the ability or authority to make those online spaces part of the mission and ministry of the whole church?
12. Do you feel that you have both the media and theological confidence to use your online spaces?
13. Do you think there's a relationship between the ecclesiology of a church, and how it approaches social media spaces?
14. Is there anything that has come to mind while we've been talking that you've not had a chance to share, or would like to?

I had not planned to ask quite so many questions, but I found I wanted to nuance and explore some of the issues that the participants were raising.

Two of the people in the focus group were clergy and one was lay: I had hoped to include six people in the focus group, but finding a date where they could take part proved impossible. I arranged a date where four people could take part; two clergy and two laity, but one of the lay people cancelled at the last minute. However, the data I collected from the group of three was so strong I felt there was no need to arrange a second focus group. The participants had interacted with each other as well as answering my questions and I felt that the dynamics were just as valuable as the answers to my questions. I therefore propose that this research should be seen either as a pilot study for further research or as indication of trends, rather than the final word in the subject.

Findings

In this section, I will report my findings from researching whether people who mediate online spaces and communities have authority within their contexts, offline and online, and whether they are able to make their online spaces part of the mission and ministry of their church.

Online survey

In the online survey, I received responses from 20 participants, 7 clergy and 13 lay people. The full responses to the survey are in Appendix 1. I will refer to the participants by the number in which they answered the survey; an anonymous description of each participant is below.

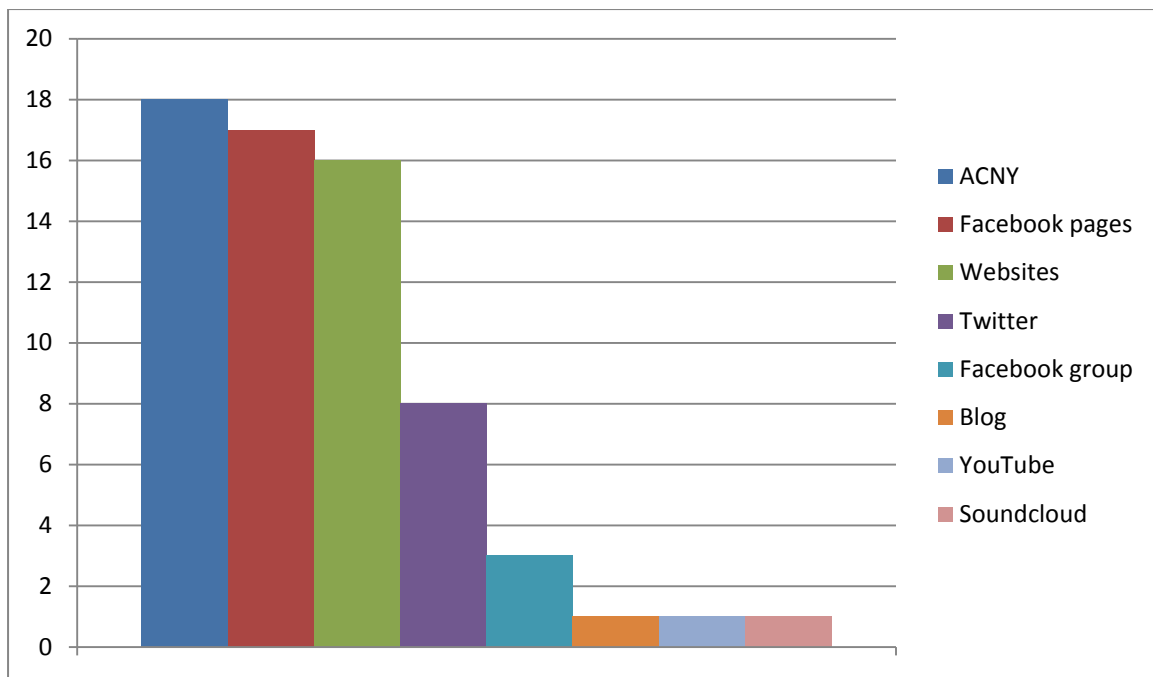
Participant number	Role
1	Incumbent of rural benefice in the Archdeaconry of York. Manages website.
2	Churchwarden and PCC member of rural benefice in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages website.
3	Churchwarden and PCC member of town church in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page.
4	Incumbent of town church in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding. Manages Facebook page, Facebook group, and website.

5	Youth worker of town church in the Archdeaconry of York. Manages Facebook page, Facebook group, Twitter feed, and website.
6	PCC member of town church in the Archdeaconry of York. Manages Facebook page and ACNY entry.
7	Curate of town church in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding. Manages Facebook page.
8	Incumbent of town church in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page, Twitter feed, website, blog, and ACNY entry.
9	Churchwarden of rural church in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page and ACNY entry.
10	Reader and PCC member of town church in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding. Manages Facebook page and website.
11	Curate of urban church in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding. Manages Facebook page, Twitter feed, YouTube and SoundCloud accounts.
12	Curate of town church in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page, Twitter feed, website and ACNY entry.
13	Youth worker and PCC member of town church in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding. Manages Facebook page and Twitter feed.
14	RPA and PCC member of rural benefice in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page.

15	Member of town church in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page, Twitter feed, website and ACNY entry.
16	Incumbent of a town/ rural benefice in the Archdeaconry of York. Manages Facebook page and Twitter feed.
17	PCC member of an urban church in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page and website.
18	PCC member of a town church in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding. Manages website and ACNY entry.
19	PCC member of a rural benefice in the Archdeaconry of York. Manages website and ACNY entry.
20	RPA and PCC member of town church in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. Manages Facebook page, Twitter feed, website and ACNY entry.

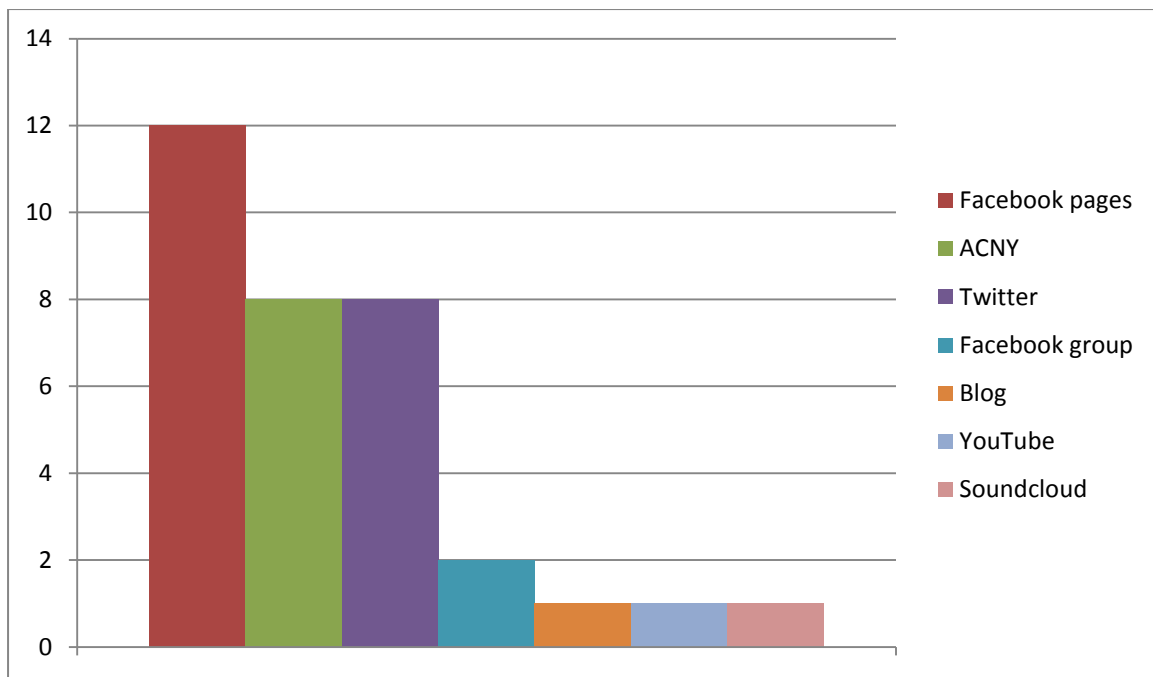
Online spaces used

The participants' churches had a presence in a variety of online spaces: 18 had entries on ACNY, 17 had Facebook pages, 16 had websites, 8 had Twitter accounts, 3 had Facebook groups, 1 had a blog, and 1 also had a YouTube and SoundCloud account.



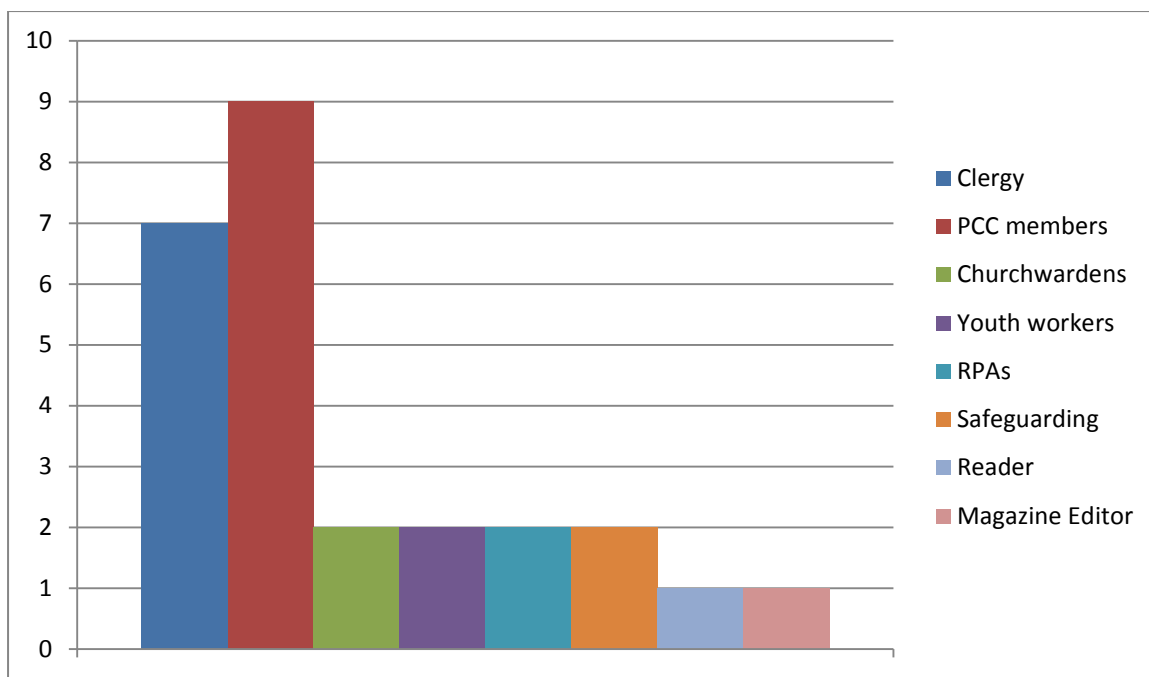
Spaces managed by my participants

Of my 20 participants, 16 managed the Facebook page, 12 managed the church's website, 8 managed the ACNY page, 8 managed the Twitter account, 2 managed a Facebook group, 1 managed the blog, and 1 managed the YouTube and SoundCloud account. 17 of the 20 participants have other people from their church who also post to or manage these accounts: online mission and ministry seems to be a team activity, not a solo one.



Offline Roles

19 of the 20 people also have roles of authority or influence in the offline church, whether they are clergy or lay. Of the 13 laity who took part (bearing in mind many laity have several roles within a church), 9 were PCC members, 2 were churchwardens, 2 were youth workers, 2 were Recognised Parish Assistants, 2 were safeguarding representatives, 1 was a Reader, and 1 was editor of the parish magazine. Only 1 person managed an online space with no role of authority or influence in the church offline.



There is variety in whether the offline church recognises these people's roles in online spaces. The breakdown is roughly the same for clergy as for laity:

	Clergy	Laity
Online roles recognised by offline church	2	4
Online roles not recognised by offline church	2	3
Variety of experience expressed	3	6

The participants' responses read as follows:

Participant number	Comment
1	No. Most of the regular congregation use paper-based communication as their primary way of getting information. However, fringe members are far more likely to access online information.
2	Yes. Gives us presence and identity online. Informs locals and congregation. Brings visitors to us and adds to collections.
3	Some do but others do not understand use of social media
4	Yes and no - they like having a website and know people come to us though the website. I don't think they have any idea how time consuming it is.
5	There is a growing acceptance of the need for social media but limited skills and expertise within the church family in our parish.
6	I think they think that having a website (at least) is important - it shows that the church is doing its bit! I don't think they really have much idea about the Facebook side of things. And I suspect they think it all runs itself!
7	Not really - most of them don't use facebook and don't really understand why it's important to have a presence on it. They understand the website as the concept is older.
8	Yes, we have a lot of people making contact through Facebook and the Website. Though we do use other methods of communication (radio,

	<p>fliers, posters, word of mouth) we recognize that social media has a much more immediate impact and perhaps even further reach for us.</p> <p>We are connecting with people who of course already use social media extensively and are happy to make the most of this method of communication. We also appreciate that a 'like' on our Facebook page isn't the same as getting involved in the life of the church, though some eventually do. We have advertised a number of new initiatives through Facebook and have had a fantastic response.</p>
9	<p>Not fully. Some use Facebook, but only for family 'chit chat'. There are some who are still struggling with email and are as afraid of opening their devices up to social media as they are of opening up to other people.</p>
10	<p>Many of our members are elderly and not terribly internet 'savvy'. I wouldn't go so far as saying that the church is 'indifferent' to our web site but at best they have a 'passive' response to it. It is not a topic discussed very frequently, even at our PCC meetings. Only very occasionally, do we get a response on our website from our community - usually someone wanting a baptism. We have accumulated 20+ likes on our Facebook page over a period of about 2 years.</p>
11	<p>Increasingly so. Our Some of our lovely golden oldies are still suspicious of the Internet but people coming to church as a result of our online presence has helped change attitudes.</p>
12	<p>Yes: it is understood as a vital mission tool, but one which they are</p>

	unable to manage themselves because they don't understand the technology.
13	Yes everyone enjoys seeing the page and follow it.
14	Very few of our regular church attenders are interested - they do not have on-line presence themselves. I feel supported by my vicar - she is aware that those on the edge of our church do keep up to date with posting, although she herself has no input.
15	Yes. The church is changing and the way the message gets out is more and more through social media and websites.
16	Some do - (younger generation - i.e. under 60 in church terms!) Many can't see the point.
17	Yes, most of the PCC see that our social media presence is really important and add/post to the site, some older members don't see the significance.
18	Usually welcomed across those who use the web as another channel for letting people know about our church. How important is difficult to judge - not recognised within PCC structure. Keep getting likes on Facebook and that links to website.
19	Probably - as no-one else willing to take on the role! Benefice pays annual fee for Benefice website hosting. Regular requests to insert items into Benefice website from constituent parishes.

20	No. A shortage of Faith and loads of fear.
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16 out of 20 people say they have training that has equipped them for the role. They seemed to prioritise media training rather than theological training. The participants' responses were as follows:

Participant number	Comment
1	Yes. Various training courses on social media and communication
2	IT training as part of job.
3	Only meeting with Eleanor
4	No
5	Yes
6	A couple of Theology courses and your workshop on social media. A very basic course in Web design.
7	Yes - from the Diocese
8	No
9	1 day workshop with Dr Bex Lewis on social media at Diocesan House.
10	No
11	At theological college (Cranmer) we had some Twitter training.

12	One hour session on how to manage the Church website (via Wordpress) provided by the website designers (LaserRed)
13	Yes
14	RPA training
15	Workshop on setting up church website and facebook page
16	Yes, an evening with the dioc communications officer a day event in 2014
17	Yes social media training via Anglican voices
18	No - background in IT
19	One group session arranged by Diocese
20	I have attended courses run by Premier Radio and also by the York Diocese with Eleanor Course and Bex Lewis.

9 out of 20 people had experience of managing an online space that helped them with their role. The participants' responses were as follows:

Participant number	Comment
1	Yes, previous experience designing and updating a company website
2	Yes - used to manage Creative Arts Retreat Movement (CARM) website.

3	No
4	No - just some good conversations with friends
5	Yes - my other role is as a freelance marketing consultant.
6	Run websites for brass band and related association
7	No - only as a user of Facebook.
8	No
9	No professional experience
10	Not really. Only managing my own Facebook page very infrequently.
11	Not really, but being a journalist in my former life has helped.
12	Designed and published website for Common Room at theological college; personal use of Facebook and Twitter
13	Yes through working with social services
14	Previous job role in marketing/communications
15	Yes I manage other facebook pages have previously setup and run a website
16	No
17	Yes, website, FB account and twitter account through my work with Church Urban Fund
18	No

19	No
20	No

When asked if they wanted more training, and what that might entail, 19 out of 20 people were willing to receive more training to help them with their roles. The participants' responses were as follows:

Participant number	Yes/No	Comment
1	Yes	It would be good to keep abreast of what is happening on social media and hear updates
2	Yes	Making websites more responsive and mobile-friendly.
3	Yes	Any new developments
4	Yes	A 'roadshow' rolled out to deaneries.
5	Yes	How to gain more followers on Facebook. Best practice.
6	Yes	More technical training to enable more effective website design
7	Yes	A one-to-one session on how to improve it, and the skills needed to achieve this, with ideas from other pages to help visualise the possibilities.
8	Yes	I'm not sure to be honest. A lot of it seems rather intuitive to me, though I would be open to ideas on doing

		things better.
9	Yes	Further workshops to follow on from the introductory day to look the at creating & managing of a variety of e-spaces more closely in individual 'how to' sessions and include evaluating their use & effectiveness. These could be conducted in traditional form at Diocesan House, in a group online conference via Skype or similar, or by the use of e-learning materials remotely accessed online individually.
10	Yes	I think a local training session, even just dedicated to our website would be most helpful. If such an event could be held it would be helpful to invite other members of the church to attend, so there could be several people who had the knowledge to manage the web site. It would also be helpful to know what other website formats were available as our current site doesn't come across as terribly 'exciting'.
11	Yes	Workshops on not just how churches can use social media etc but how it can be used missionally. Examples of good practice to be circulated regularly via the diocese links.
12	Yes	It would be useful to have more people within the parish able to manage our online presence - but many do not

		have computers, and those that do have only a basic grasp on them.
13	Yes	How to get our church noticed more.
14	Yes	Setting up a church website Setting up multiple twitter accounts Convincing and training others to take part.
15	Yes	Keeping things relevant and working within church guidelines on content
16	Yes	I am considering asking a professional company to set up a modern website for us, which provide ongoing support and training as necessary.
17	Yes	I think we would welcome this as a church as we want to maximise our social media presence e.g. develop twitter account.
18	No	Guarded - as I would ideally like to find another person to do this and I have other stuff to do.
19	Yes	On-line training programme or interactive group sessions.
20	No	I have put no simply because I found that the church in the main is not very responsive and in some cases regards it has a threat.

Focus group findings

Roles

Three people participated in the focus group. Participant 1 (P1) was a lay person, who is also a youth minister in her church in a rural area of the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. She is a member of the PCC and a Recognised Parish Assistant.

Participant 2 (P2) was ordained and a curate at her church in a coastal town in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding. Participant 3 (P3) was also ordained, and also a curate at his traditional Anglo-Catholic church in a market town in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. The full transcript of the focus group is in Appendix 3.

Online spaces

P1 set up and manages her church's Facebook page. The church also has an ACNY page, but she does not manage this. P2 manages her church's Facebook page, but not their website or ACNY page. P3 manages his church's website, ACNY page, Facebook page and Twitter account, in conjunction with one lay person.

Role of social media sites

P1 and P2 agreed that the role of social media sites is to reach out to people who are not part of the regular church congregation. P1 said, "I think it's to reach out to people who don't get to our church regularly, who have got an interest and you do get people, quite a broad selection of people turning up who are linked in with us, whether it's just the local people who are Facebook savvy or whether its people that are visiting the area and see the Facebook page, people might send in enquiries

about ancestry and things like that.²” P2 agreed, speaking about her Facebook page, “I think, for me it’s about getting information out there reminding folk about what’s going on and being a bit more informal and chatty than the website page which is very formal in set-up. And trying to engage folk as well, which isn’t very successful at the moment, so I’m happy for some tips on that, but trying to get people to respond”.

P3 saw the role of social media as celebrating the church and linking the church and community, saying “I think the way we use ours is very much related to the community and the use of the church, the physical church as it were.... And it’s a way of celebrating the life of the community, internally. And I think it’s also a way of showing what’s going on with the church.... And so it’s a way of showing that the church isn’t just a building but it’s actually a community, and I think it’s important to link that together”. Later, P3 mentioned that he did not see online as a replacement for offline church, saying “I don’t think the online is a replacement. About ten years ago, I don’t know if it’s still going, there was the idea of virtual church, and Ship of Fools and things like that. Well I wouldn’t perceive that as an alternative, I think it’s very much a complement and celebration”.

Relationships between the online church presence and the offline church

P1 and P2 felt that there was not much alignment between the online and offline church. P1 said, “I think the physical church and the people within it who are the regulars, have no connection to the Facebook page whatsoever. There are very few

² All the quotes from the Focus Group are taken from the transcript of the interview, which is provided in full in Appendix 3.

of the congregation, and it's a very old congregation, there are two or three, and I have to say, on the PCC, it's 'ooh, the Facebook page! It's yours! Its fine, you do it!' There's no support, no offer of support, no questions of what I should do with it". P1 felt a lot of this was due to her lone role on the Facebook page, saying "I feel it's me acting on my own, I guess. It is down to me doing it, and although I'm linked, I'm part of the mission of the church, I know that, but I'm out on a limb!" She also expressed anxiety that her role as a lay person made this more difficult, saying, "should I be making more commentary on the content of the services, or should I be making... I don't want it to sound like it's my opinion as just... just a lay person..."

P2 felt there was not even alignment between the different online spaces, saying, "In my head they are. But there is a disconnect between the Facebook page and the website because that's someone else's, it's very much their baby, hands off, yeah, so it's quite difficult that I operate independently of the church website. I don't think they've got a link to our Facebook page".

P3 felt the mission and ministry of the offline and online church was currently aligned, because he had a role of authority in all those spaces, saying "if mission is about the congregation being missional, or whatever the word is, as well, then actually this is something I've kept, rather than something I've... I think because of the importance and because it's new, I think that's one way in which the priest might be a leader in mission. When I leave, the vicar isn't terribly technologically literate, so I think we're going to have to find someone who can do that sort of thing and who understands it, but yes, it is part of the whole church community, but in a way that it is provided for them at the moment".

Is their work online valued and supported by the offline church?

P1 and P2 felt they were not always supported. P1 said, "There are some times when you think you're just expected to do it and people expect things to happen, but there are a lot of people who are around and being supportive, making sure you don't do too much". She felt that people were more supportive of her children and youth work in the church, saying "I don't think the Facebook page gets that recognition at all. But certainly the work I do with the physical church, physically with children and youth, that's recognised. Because it's there, it's physical, they're seeing it. They're seeing the change in the church that's happening in church in the children's corner, they're seeing that I look after them on a Sunday, trying to do other events and what have you, so they're seeing that. So, as an aging community that isn't particularly online, they don't see it. And I guess unless people are marching in and going 'well I'm here because I saw something on Facebook', they're not going to recognise it".

P2 agreed, saying "Your children and youth work is visible, therefore it's valued, because if it wasn't there it would be noticed. But I think you're noticed, people wouldn't notice if Facebook wasn't there. Um, because its influence is very different to the physical church. But of course that doesn't mean that it's less valuable, it's just more unseen. I suppose the work of the mission committee, if you have such a thing, similarly, it would be noticed if it wasn't there. It's almost as if there is a hierarchy of visibility. If it happens on a Sunday morning, people notice it. If it happens on a weeknight, fewer people know about it. If it happens in the internet, in the web, then it's not real in quite the same way for people". She felt her role online

was seen as “a bit niche. It’s something I asked to do, and people were a bit ‘well what do you want to do that for? Haven’t you got enough to do?’ But actually no, because this is important, I perceive it’s important, we should be doing this because, no it’s not all seen in the same light. Even the website is seen as a thing that sits there, it’s a thing that somebody does, it’s very nice, we don’t really engage with that”.

P3 felt differently, because he had been able to tell his congregation “the story of why it’s important. And I think the fact that they’ve bought that, not wanting to sound like a used car salesman, but the fact they’ve bought that is good, I get the support I want”.

Perceptions of their own authority, on- and offline

P1 and P2 expressed nuanced feelings of authority within their online roles. P1 said, “I’m pretty certain that if I said I was going to do something with it everyone would be, you know, ok, be fine... So yeah, I think I’ve got authority, no-one’s stopping me, I think they’re quite happy someone is doing it!” However, she also reflected that “In some respects, it’s great that they trust me to do it, but I just wonder if a) they know what it is I’m doing, and b) if I did something they didn’t like, you know, what would happen?... I would reflect on that with my previous career in corporate life. You know where you are in a structure, in a management structure, and you are bound by your job role, and you don’t have that in a church setting, and it’s like, I’m seeking permission to do stuff, I don’t know who to ask, I don’t know who should be saying yes to it”. She found that people treated her as an expert online and with her youth work in church.

P2 was ambiguous about her sense of authority and seemed to suggest it was constructed by other people, saying “Whether I think I have them or not is irrelevant, because people give you that, whether you necessarily want it or not, they see you in that role.... People expect things of you, treat you differently whether you like it or not. And that’s an interesting place”.

P3 was much more confident in his sense of authority, saying “All these things have been set up so no-one can do anything on them apart from me and the person who I give the password to, and I have no qualms about deleting what she puts on, anything like that. I think it’s a very public image of the church, and there are things you can’t have control over, and there’s a danger with that. But if you keep tight control over it it’s less likely to spiral out of control”. He also found that statistics were useful in showing the importance of social media to the PCC, saying, “We have our registers and can tell how many people come to church, and if I can say we’ve got 500 followers on Twitter, and I say that every time I put out a tweet, 500 people will see that. It blows their minds away actually”.

Do they have both the media and theological confidence to use their online spaces?

P1 expressed that she had media confidence and ability, but less theological confidence, saying, “I use social media for my own purposes, I can tick that box, and obviously from my previous background in PR and marketing communications I can tick that box, which is probably why I’ve been left to get on with it because “she knows what she’s doing” in the mechanics of it, but... the... the theological

confidence is probably less so because I personally feel I'm still finding my way, almost!"

P2 had perhaps less media experience, but similar levels of confidence. Her theological confidence was high, but perhaps she felt unsure about how to use it online: "My experience of Facebook was as a user, so of course you then think 'how difficult is it to run a page, what does it involve, oh I could probably do that' and so you work your way into it, like most things like that. I don't really comment anything theologically at all, at the moment, and I don't know why, actually. I think probably because I'm just trying to get people interested in it, or maybe they'd be more interested in it if I did! Maybe I'm missing the point, or what's going to get people where they're at, to include more commentary".

P3 said that he was "completely confident" in both media and theology. However, he was worried about what would happen when he leaves the church, saying, "That's worrying, if, when the mantle's handed on, you can show someone how to do something, and the moment it changes, and it's the most simple changes that can be the most confusing, with a computer screen as well as with anything, so getting someone to run a Facebook feed, they've have to be pretty, they'll have to be immersing in it, to understand how it works, rather than saying you know...

Theoretically one could say to a parish secretary 'here's our Facebook account'. Not that we have a parish secretary. But then, if that parish secretary can type out a log but can't quite understand Facebook, then there's going to be a problem there".

However, the next day P1 emailed me to say “I was having difficulties last night articulating that worrying about my own doubts or abilities to get the ‘right’ message across makes me reluctant to get into theological debates online”. She mentioned she was currently reading "The Wounded Healer" by Henri Nouwen, and had read “from Chapter 2, part 2 - Tomorrow's leader, section 1; The minister as the articulator of inner events: ‘The key word here is articulation...’ ‘Only he who is able to articulate his own experience can offer himself to others as a source of clarification.’” She added, “That makes me think it's not just about theological confidence, it's being theologically articulate. And that's something I presume clergy are likely to be more confident with!”³

Do they feel there is a relationship between the ecclesiology of a church and how it approaches social media spaces?

P3 was the only person who answered this question directly. He felt that it was more to do with the personality of the person managing the social media space, saying. “I think the difference is probably in approach in so far as I would say that personally, not anything to do with my congregation, I’m quite authoritarian, so I have no problem in leading. And I have more problems in delegating. And I think that can happen at the other end of the spectrum as well, with anyone, but I think it’s a personality thing rather than a tradition thing. But I think you’re probably right, being from the Anglo-Catholic tradition there is a natural role for the priest in the community there, that doesn’t have to be forged out. But again, the delegation thing, it may well relate, but I think it’s a personality thing as well. I have more qualms asking someone to put up theological comments on the page than anything else.

³ P1’s full response is in Appendix 4.

Because I think a parish has to be consistent in its theology. I would be very concerned with comments that people would put online, if they're not according to my theological views they wouldn't be on there. Not saying I have personal theological views, but I think teaching has to be consistent and clear, and while discussion can be useful, there's not a clearer way of responding as there is in person to theological discussion, and you see these rants people have on Twitter, one post after another, and then people misunderstand, and misinterpret, and you end up digging a hole, and then all things can happen. It's easier not to happen in that forum, almost. I don't publish my sermons online either, and I'm not keen to do so".

Mutual collaboration

As explained in my methodology, I see mutual collaboration in the research as crucial, allowing participants to play an active role. As such, at the end of the focus group, I offered the participants a chance to raise any issues that had come to mind during our discussion, or which they had not yet had a chance to share. The topics that were raised included the lack of national or Diocesan guidance on online interaction, including safeguarding information and whether clergy should add parishioners as friends on Facebook.

After I had conducted the online survey and focus group, I wanted all the participants to have a chance to critique my findings. I emailed them all (Appendix 2) and three people responded, saying:

- As someone previously involved in online presence I agree entirely with your findings.

- This sounds about right I think, for me the big question is "is social media just a notice board or a tool for mission?", I think it can be the latter but that's where the training and understanding is needed.
- I suppose deep down I believe that our online presence exists only to serve the church community of [name of church], gathered in real spaces and not virtual ones, though I have been so impressed with the way people respond to information we have posted on Facebook and to some extent on Twitter. I appreciate my view might be seen as slightly dismissive of the greater potential in social media for building the Church. I have for a long time simply seen it as a great communication tool but that's all - I haven't been trying to create a virtual church, nor do I think I should. I am somewhat suspicious of promoting an 'online community' as I tend to think of it as a kind of disembodied church or even a gnostic church, meaning one that has separated the physical from the spiritual and one that people can accept on their own terms. The Church is a body - social media is brilliant don't get me wrong, but it is not the same as gathering human beings together into a physical space. I do use technology to pray as well, whether that technology is a book or an ipad - they can help me draw closer to God and to others, even if I am not physically in the same room with others. But that can't be my main form of worship - my main form of worship must involve other human beings actually present with me in the same room, and instinct built into the Book of Common Prayer where it does not allow a priest to celebrate Holy Communion unless someone is actually present with him. I think that one of

the indicators of the difference between the actual and the virtual is by looking carefully at the way people behave sometimes on Facebook - responding in such a way that is offensive or even full of hate and anger, behaving in a way that they wouldn't if they were physically present. Is it also something to do with avatar culture that I also find difficult to accept? It's disembodied and anonymous (at least in the way it is experienced) - and comments on Facebook or YouTube, where religion is the topic (or just about anything that gets the blood pumping really), show that dialogue may be possible and real communication make take place...but rarely! However, I do know that people can behave appallingly even face to face, but the virtual space feels a bit more like talking about church rather than being church...

This last comment echoes the comments from P3 in the Focus Group, saying that online spaces are not a replacement for online church.

In the next chapter I will discuss the implications of these findings.

Discussion

Methodology

Before discussing the implications of my findings, I will look at the outcomes of my methodology. This is in line with Finlay's (2002) description of the self-reflexive researcher as one who evaluates the research process, method and outcomes.

The strategy of using an online survey and direct interviews in a focus group was successful. I obtained the data and insights that I needed, and I was able to prioritise the participants' experiences. This method of data gathering allowed me to follow Cheong, Huang and Poon's (2011) approach of prioritising self-reporting narrative. I agree with them that the "use of self-reporting narratives serves to enhance our understanding of personal and cultural experiences because meanings of the self and of events are located within specific cultures and times".

I found this to be especially the case when asking the participants in the focus group about their understanding of their own authority. When talking about herself as an authority, P2 related this to her specific experience as a curate, saying "I think in my parish, there are... and I will stereotype them as little old ladies... who have a certain deference, to me, even as informal as I am, I am still the curate and that matters to them. And then at the other end of the spectrum there are folk who just happen to come along to our ten o'clock service which just happens to be part of an Anglican church, but they've no idea, really, what I am, beyond a person standing at the front in a dog collar. So there's that whole interconnected spectrum of respect and just people from free church backgrounds to whom I'm just a person to them, so there is

a very mixed idea of what my role actually is, which in your situation [speaking to P3] is probably clearer and I don't think that's a bad thing, necessarily. But there is a much broader understanding of who I am by dint of being the curate, and I think that does feed through into all sorts of ways, yes". I do not think I could have understood P3's nuanced and evolving sense of her own authority in her context, or understood how that relates to her sense of authority online, if she had not been allowed to express this in her own words and in her own time.

I felt the specific questions I asked, as well as my methodology, were fruitful. They gave me the data to answer specific questions such as whether online religious authorities also have positions of responsibility in the offline church and how participants felt about their own experience of authority. If I were to repeat the research, I would ask two more questions of my focus group participants. It is hard to generalise from three participants in a focus group, but I did notice that the one man amongst them felt very confident about his authority and ability. The two women felt less confident as authorities in online spaces, and perhaps in offline spaces. If I were to research this topic further, it would be interesting to see whether gender plays a role in the multiple layers of authority in online spaces. Do men find it easier to become and be authorities in online spaces?

If I were to conduct similar research again, I would also want to ask questions that directly related to Campbell's (2007a) theory of the religious-social shaping of technology. I would ask specific questions about the participants' understanding of "the history and tradition" of their church "in relation to its media use, the core beliefs and patterns related to media, the specific negotiation processes it undergoes with a

new technology, and the communal framing and discourses created to define and justify their technology use”. I chose to focus my questions on the participants’ understanding of authority and how their churches’ online and offline spaces related to each other. But as the focus group went on, the influence of P3’s Anglo-Catholic ecclesiology became clear and I would have liked to explore more of the religious-social shaping of technology in relation to all three churches. I tried to draw P1 and P2 out in some of these areas, but they did not seem to answer the question in the way I invited them to.

I perceived no tension in the focus group or online survey which could be attributed to my dual role as practitioner and researcher. I was aware that I asked several leading questions in the focus group (which I would not want to repeat in future research!) such as:

- We’ve touched on this a bit already, but what do you think the relationships are between the online church presence and the offline church? It sounds as though it’s an integral part, so far, from what you are saying. Do you feel the two are linked?
- We’ve talked about how the Facebook page and website are used, but the Facebook page is perhaps a little disjointed from the mission and ministry of the whole church. Within the context of the whole church, do you feel you have the ability or authority to make those online spaces part of the mission and ministry of the whole church? I think your answer [to P3] would be ‘it sort of is actually’. Is that right?

The interpersonal nature of the focus group brought out interesting dynamics between the three participants. At one point, P3 was questioning P1 about her role in the church suggesting that as she was a lay person she was not involved in all aspects of church life and therefore could not represent that holistic view on the church Facebook page. P1 explained that she was involved in a great deal of church life and she did not feel that was the case. This interaction meant that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of both participants, that P3 perhaps felt that only a clergy person could fully understand and represent church life and that P1 was involved with many areas of church life she had not previously mentioned.

I was a little worried about P1 in parts of the focus group. The chance to discuss some of the issues surrounding the offline and online church spaces seemed to bring out emotions of frustration and regret. Talking about the relationship between the church and the Facebook page, she sounded a little tearful, saying “As an aging community that isn’t particularly online, they don’t see it. And I guess unless people are marching in and going ‘well I’m here because I saw something on Facebook’, they’re not going to recognise it”. I was heartened when P1 emailed me the next day with her reflections after reading Henri Nouwen (Appendix 4), which suggested that she had felt comfortable with the conversation, had reflected on it and wanted to further explain her position to me.

As part of my methodology, I engaged in mutual collaboration, allowing the participants of both the focus group and the online survey to critique my early findings (Appendix 2). The second and third responses, as listed above, focus on the purpose of engagement in online spaces. When I asked the focus group

participants whether there was anything they wanted to add at the end of our session, they mentioned the lack of guidance on how to use social media spaces, both as a church and personally. This is helpful for me as a practitioner, showing where I need to give more suggestions and guidance, and this will inform my suggestions in the conclusion to this dissertation.

Locations of authority – online and offline

One of the main questions I set out to research was whether the people who manage online spaces for churches in the Diocese of York also have positions of authority in the offline church. The results of my online survey give a clear steer: the people who manage online spaces also have roles in the offline church. If they are laity, they tend to be PCC members or churchwardens. Of the clergy who took part in the survey, four were incumbents and three were curates.

Having these roles does not necessarily mean they have a position of absolute authority. It is easier for clergy, particularly incumbents, to have a role of authority within their church. However, many clergy would express that their authority does not extend to all areas of church life, particularly if they are new to a role and there are churchwardens or members of the PCC who have attended the church all their lives! Similarly, curates may or may not have authority in a church. Cheong (2013) describes authority online as “performative and discursive” and as “an order and quality of communication”, and I would suggest this is true of authority in offline church life as well. Authority is continually being constructed and reconstructed.

However, the fact that the people who manage online spaces have defined roles in the offline church is encouraging, as it shows potential for the online spaces to be linked to the mission and ministry of the offline church.

Qualities of authority – power and knowledge

In the literature review above, I noted that one gap in previous research on religious authority online relates to the nature or quality of authority. The word authority is often used to recognise status: a clergy person is an authority in their church. But the word, of course, also carries connotations of ability and knowledge as well as status. This sense of ability, expertise or knowledge is not examined in the field of literature. Another question I wanted to ask therefore is whether the people who manage online spaces feel they have the skills and abilities to be authorities in their online spaces.

Sixteen out of the twenty people who took part in the online survey reported that they have had training which equipped them for their role. They prioritised technical or media training, rather than theological or missional training. Nine of the twenty had previous experience of managing an online space. All three participants in the focus group felt they were technically capable of running an online space. The technical ability to run a space was equally distributed between clergy and laity.

Overall, most people I surveyed who manage an online space feel they have the technological knowledge, skills or expertise to do so. They are authorities in the sense of having the media knowledge to fulfil the role. However, the participants did not show especial confidence in their knowledge of how to use the spaces as part of

mission and ministry. They did not feel they were authorities in the missional use of the online space. This was expressed by one lay participant in her response to my email presenting the early summary of my findings, saying, “For me the big question is ‘is social media just a notice board or a tool for mission?’, I think it can be the latter but that’s where the training and understanding is needed”. This sense of unease was also expressed in the focus group by P1 and P2. P1 expressed this as “I would like to think you could develop it and do more contemplative comments and invite some more conversation through it, ‘what did you think of the sermon today? The reading was this, what did you think about that?’ I’d love to develop it into that, but I don’t think I’ve got the support to do that and I’m a bit wary about doing it myself as a lay person”. She also later said, “I use social media for my own purposes, I can tick that box, and obviously from my previous background in PR and marketing communications I can tick that box, which is probably why I’ve been left to get on with it because ‘she knows what she’s doing’ in the mechanics of it, but... the... the theological confidence is probably less so because I personally feel I’m still finding my way, almost! You’re not having anyone tell you it, I’m still having those ‘aha!’ moments. I know everyone still does, but you know”.

P2 expressed similar comments, saying “I don’t really comment anything theologically at all, at the moment, and I don’t know why, actually. I think probably because I’m just trying to get people interested in it, or maybe they’d be more interested in it if I did! Maybe I’m missing the point, or what’s going to get people where they’re at, to include more commentary... It’s an odd one really. Where do you begin?”

Those who manage online spaces lack, overall, the theological or missional knowledge of how to use these spaces. As acknowledged above, this is more likely to be the case for lay people, and perhaps for clergy who have less of a sense of their own authority in offline spaces. P3, who had a strong sense of his own authority in online and offline spaces, reported he was “completely confident” in both his technical and missional knowledge of online spaces.

If we look at authority in terms of power or influence, the findings are mixed. Of the twenty online survey participants, six felt their roles were recognised by the offline church, five felt they were not recognised, and nine expressed a variety of experiences. The nature of authority is bound up with the importance that the offline church gives to the online space. This was expressed by P2 when she was responding to the fact that P1 felt she was an authority in terms of her children and youth work, but not her online work: “You’re visible, your children and youth work is visible, therefore it’s valued, because if it wasn’t there it would be noticed. But I think you’re noticed, people wouldn’t notice if Facebook wasn’t there. Um, because its influence is very different to the physical church. But of course that doesn’t mean that it’s less valuable, it’s just more unseen. I suppose the work of the mission committee, if you have such a thing, similarly, it would be noticed if it wasn’t there. It’s almost as if there is a hierarchy of visibility. If it happens on a Sunday morning, people notice it. If it happens on a weeknight, fewer people know about it. If it happens in the internet, in the web, then it’s not real in quite the same way for people”. This idea of the “hierarchy of visibility” is crucial to understanding the relationship between the offline church and online space, and the authority of its

manager. If the online space is not seen (and therefore not considered important) by the offline church, the manager of that space is not seen as an authority.

Recognition of authority

If members of the offline church recognise the skills and knowledge of their religious authorities online, the managers of these online spaces are seen as authorities in terms of ability. But if the online space itself is not recognised as important, members of the offline church will not recognise their authority in the sense of power or influence. If the online spaces are not linked to the offline church, the participants' role of authority online does not extend to the offline church.

The managers of online spaces see themselves as authorities in terms of technical knowledge, but are less likely to see themselves as authorities in how to use the online spaces as part of the wider church's mission and ministry, or as authorities in the sense of having power or influence in the offline church. The results of the focus group suggest that clergy (and possibly men?) are more likely to see themselves as authorities than lay people (or possibly women?). This links back to how the offline church sees the individual. If they have a position of power offline, they will be recognised as such online.

We see here, again, that authority is emergent and constructed. In the focus group, P3 feels as though he is an authority online and offline, and this is validated by his congregation. P2 feels her authority is constructed by the congregation, and this gives her a sense of authority. I had not particularly planned to have two curates on the focus group, but this was perhaps fortuitous, as they are at a point in their clerical

career when their identity and sense of authority is being formed. P1 does not have such ordained authority offline, and feels little online.

Are the online spaces part of the mission and ministry of the whole church?

There can be a real disconnect between a church's offline mission and ministry, and the role of the church's online spaces. This is partly due to conflicting understandings of the purpose or role of online spaces. In the focus group, P3 felt there was a relationship between the on and offline church, but said, "I would perceive the online to be feeding the offline.... I don't think the online is a replacement. About ten years ago, I don't know if it's still going, there was the idea of virtual church, and Ship of Fools and things like that. Well I wouldn't perceive that as an alternative, I think it's very much a complement and celebration".

This response is very similar to the comment of one clergy person, after I invited comment on my thesis: "I suppose deep down I believe that our online presence exists only to serve the church community of [name of church].... I am somewhat suspicious of promoting an 'online community' as I tend to think of it as a kind of disembodied church or even a gnostic church, meaning one that has separated the physical from the spiritual and one that people can accept on their own terms".

Church spaces online are here seen as a poor second best, or even a threat to the offline church. As such, it is hard to make them an integral part of mission and ministry. Demonstrated here is a sense of confusion as to what online spaces are and can be to the church. This is also demonstrated in another comment from an online survey participant: "For me the big question is 'is social media just a notice

board or a tool for mission?', I think it can be the latter but that's where the training and understanding is needed".

The question of whether online spaces are part of the mission and ministry of the whole church is closely linked to the authority of the manager of the space. If they have authority in the offline church (as with P3) the online spaces become part of the overall mission and ministry, because they are carried into them by a person with authority. But P1 and P2, who had less authority in the offline church, found there was a disconnect between offline and online. When P2 was asked if the mission and ministry of the church and the Facebook page were aligned, she replied "In my head they are" before saying that there was not even alignment between the Facebook page and church website. P1 commented that "the physical church and the people within it who are the regulars, have no connection to the Facebook page whatsoever".

This goes back to the question of the visibility of the online ministry. If it is not seen by the congregation, it is less likely to be valued and less likely to be part of the overall mission and ministry of the church.

I suspect that there is another aspect at play here, which could be examined in future research: whether the offline church has a clear sense of what its mission and ministry is. From my experience working in the Diocese of York, I have encountered many churches which do not have a clear vision of what their mission is, or what the *Missio Dei* is, and how they might fit into that. Ministry often seems to happen in a piecemeal fashion, without a clear, overarching vision of why particular services are

held or activities undertaken. In such a context, it is entirely probable that the online spaces of such a church will lack a clear mission or ministry. They will be part of that church's piecemeal work in the world; not without merit or worth, but without clear strategy or vision.

Response to Campbell and Cheong's theories

In the Literature Review of this dissertation, I set out that my research sits within three theories and frameworks: Campbell's (2010) religious-social shaping of technology, Campbell's (2007b) multiple layers of authority, and Cheong's (2013) dual logics and dialectical perspective. I will now examine how my research sits in dialogue with these theories and frameworks.

As I noted above, if I were to conduct further research, I would want to ask more specific questions with regard to Campbell's theory of the religious-social shaping of technology. However, the data from the focus group suggests that religious-social shaping of technology and Campbell's four layers of authority, are indeed at play in the churches represented. P3, in particular, showed that within his hierarchical Anglo-Catholic church, the clergy's attitude to media was crucial to its adoption by the congregation. He described approaching the PCC with a proposal for a new website, saying "We set up an argument for PCC, we got quotes in and we assessed the different quotes, and what they provided, we explained the process to the PCC and why we suggested using a particular designer, and we showed examples of their work and different things, and that's why they went for it". As curate, he was able to gain easy access to the PCC and to the offline authority to present the material in this way.

In “Religion, Media and Culture: When Religion meets new media” Campbell (2007a) notes that “paying attention to whom or what provides the basis for the community’s authority is vital, as it indicates the behavioral boundary lines of that community and by whom they are drawn”. I felt the dispersed nature of authority in the churches of P1 and P2 meant that those two participants found it hard to discover the behavioural boundaries of their churches. P1 summed this up, saying, “I would reflect on that with my previous career in corporate life. You know where you are in a structure, in a management structure, and you are bound by your job role, and you don’t have that in a church setting, and it’s like, I’m seeking permission to do stuff, I don’t know who to ask, I don’t know who should be saying yes to it. Ok, I’ve got my incumbent and the PCC, but if you’re stepping outside of the realms of what they know, like I’m in children and youth ministry, what should they do, where should they go, it’s very much stepping into the unknown and no-one really stopping you doing it. Its keep going until someone says stop, almost”.

Campbell (2007b) gives us four layers at play within authority: hierarchy, structure, belief and text. I argue that in a British Anglican context, hierarchy and structure are more important than belief and text. My research shows that many of the people who are authorities online do have positions of authority in the offline church, and are part of its hierarchy and structure, but that this authority does not necessarily extend online. As Cheong notes, this authority is negotiated and being constantly re-negotiated. I saw few, if any, examples of how beliefs or attitudes to text influenced religious authority online.

I argue that two more layers should be added to Campbell's (2007b) understanding of authority: the validation or recognition of authority (both by people in the offline church and by the religious authority online themselves), and authority as knowledge or skill. As documented above, these are crucial layers in understanding how authority is played out in online spaces.

The third theory that has framed my research into religious authority online is Cheong's (2013) concept of dual logics and a dialectical perspective on authority. My findings bear out her argument that "Authority is performative and discursive, involving persuasive claims by leaders to elicit an audience's attention, respect, and trust. Religious authority thus can be approached as an order and quality of communication, which in a media age is media-derived and dynamically constructed". P1 expresses this in comments such as "Yes, I'm on the PCC and I'm a RPA as well, so obviously that authority has been built up over years, and anything to do with children and youth ministry they look to me, so I think they see it as an extension of, 'oh, it's Facebook, it's something that the young people do, therefore she knows what she's talking about'". P2 also expresses this in the following exchange:

Researcher – "Would you say, and it's again my choice of words, that you, as a curate, have role of authority and influence in the church offline, as well as on the online church?"

P2 – "Whether I think I have them or not is irrelevant, because people give you that, whether you necessarily want it or not, they see you in that role".

Researcher – “But do you feel it?”

P2 – “Do I feel it? Yes. Because it’s reflected back. People expect things of you, treat you differently whether you like it or not. And that’s an interesting place”.

Cheong argues that “the logic of dialectics on religious authority would imply understanding the management of conflicting tensions, uneven gains, multiple opportunities, ambivalences, and challenges that new media users like religious leaders face within their online and offline experiences”. These tensions and ambivalences were expressed by P2, talking about her difficulties in posting on her Facebook page, saying, “I don’t really comment anything theologically at all, at the moment, and I don’t know why, actually. I think probably because I’m just trying to get people interested in it, or maybe they’d be more interested in it if I did! Maybe I’m missing the point, or what’s going to get people where they’re at, to include more commentary”.

My findings do suggest, however, that Cheong is incorrect in assuming that the people managing online spaces for churches are ordained. Of the 20 people contacted for the online survey, 13 were laity. However, almost all those lay people (19 out of 20) did have a role of authority offline.

Conclusions

In my research into religious authorities online in the Diocese of York, I have been able to contribute to the literature in the following areas: my research has shown that both clergy and lay people act as religious authorities online, and that these lay people tend to also have roles of responsibility in the offline church. These religious authorities online are part of the offline church's hierarchy and structure, but that authority does not necessarily extend online. Unless these people are already considered as dominant authorities in the offline church, they are not considered to be authorities (in terms of status or power) online. However, these religious authorities online are considered, both by themselves and their congregations, to be authorities in terms of having the technical or media knowledge to use these online spaces.

My research shows that any lack of authority, in terms of status and power, is partly due to a lack of visibility in the online ministry, partly due to a lack of understanding of the nature of online mission and ministry, and partly due to a lack of confidence on the part of the online religious authorities. P2's recognition of a "hierarchy of visibility" in churches is crucial: if an online space is not seen and recognised by a church, the person who manages it is not given the support they need. The online space becomes diminished, and the person who manages the space has less confidence and authority. My research shows that those people who are religious authorities online sometimes lack confidence in their ability to use the space to its full potential, and that their authority and area of work online is often not acknowledged by the wider church.

These aspects of authority are important, especially when considering the relationships between online and offline church space. My research shows there is often a real disconnection between a church's offline mission and ministry and the role of the church's online spaces. Again, this is partly due to a lack of confidence on the part of the manager of that online space, conflicting understandings of the purpose or role of online spaces, and partly due to the fact they are simply not seen as important. If the religious authority online is not confident about their work and their ability to mediate the Christian message and mission in this space, it will not be used to its full potential. My focus group results also ask the question as to whether gender may have a role to play here: it was the two women in the group who were less confident about their authority.

In terms of adding to existing theories and frameworks in the studies of religious authority online, my research shows that, in a British Anglican context, hierarchy and structure are more important than belief and text in Campbell's (2007b) four layers of authority. My research shows that two further layers need to be added to these dimensions of authority: authority as knowledge or skill, and validation or recognition of authority, both by the authority themselves and their congregations.

Challenges and suggestions

The challenges that face the religious authorities online in the Diocese of York are a lack of:

1. alignment between the church's offline mission and ministry, and the role of the church's online spaces,
2. understanding the nature and potential of online mission and ministry,

3. visibility of the church's mission and ministry online,
4. recognition of their ministry online and their authority in these online spaces,
5. confidence in themselves.

Recognising the challenges at work here fits in with Cheong's (2013) understanding of authority as emergent and dynamic. However, Cheong does not see this conflict as a simple battle between old and new, giving us a more interesting model of conflict. She gives us a model of yin and yang, conflict and accommodation, which are "seemingly opposite", but actually "interdependent, and complementary". This model allows us to see the possibility of movement in a conflict, rather than seeing this as a fixed position. It may be that I can play a role in helping foster this dynamic, helping those on both sides of this tension. This also fits into Finlay's (2002) model of the self-reflective researcher as one who "empower[s] others by opening up a more radical consciousness".

Looking at Campbell's layers of authority and the religious social shaping of technology, it is appropriate that I should offer help in my role as Communications Officer. As an episcopal church, the structures and roles of authority in the Church of England mean parishes expect to be told how to engage with new forms of church. For example, if a church wants to take out its pews or build an extension, they must apply for a faculty and get permission from the relevant committees and authorities. No permission needs to be sought to create a Facebook page or set up a website, and I think it likely this lack of guidance makes parishes feel nervous. Unlike the Roman Catholic or Latter Day Saints, the Church of England does not have a history of telling parishes how to engage with new forms of media. But the

fact that other elements of mission and ministry are carefully prescribed may mean churches expect and want more guidance and support when it comes to online spaces.

This is shown in the responses to my email to all participants with early thoughts on my findings (Appendix 2) and the final responses of my focus group participants. At the end of the focus group, I asked the participants if there was anything else they wanted to add. P2 said, “I think there’s been, as far as I’m aware, no guidance centrally, at all, there is none. Which would have been quite helpful, not least in these days of vulnerable protection, to keep everyone safe”. P3 added, “And also, related to that, personal use of social media, and what might be appropriate, it doesn’t matter when you’ve got an elderly congregation, but I know friends who are in city churches may be adding people on Facebook all the time, and people who are.. and there are questions about what might be appropriate or not appropriate in terms of that”. I take this to mean that they wanted more guidance both in terms of using online spaces, safeguarding, and the divide between personal and public online.

When I asked the participants in the online survey if they wanted more training, 19 out of 20 people were willing to receive more training to help them with their roles.

The participants’ responses included a mix of the missional and technical:

- Workshops on not just how churches can use social media etc but how it can be used missionally.
- How to get our church noticed more.
- To keep abreast of what is happening on social media and hear updates.

- How to gain more followers on Facebook. Best practice.
- Making websites more responsive and mobile-friendly.
- More technical training to enable more effective website design.
- Convincing and training others to take part.
- Keeping things relevant and working within church guidelines on content.

The one person who declined more training wrote “I have put no simply because I found that the church in the main is not very responsive and in some cases regards it as a threat”. This could be considered a cry for help with training the church, rather than for the participant!

So, what can be done? As above, I have identified the five challenges that face religious authorities online as:

1. ensuring alignment between the church’s offline mission and ministry, and the role of the church’s online spaces,
2. understanding the nature and potential of online mission and ministry,
3. ensuring the visibility of the church’s mission and ministry online,
4. ensuring a recognition of their ministry online and their authority in these online spaces,
5. nurturing confidence in themselves.

I could help with these challenges by providing training which would help both congregations and the online religious authorities. However, I predict that this will only be effective in churches which have a distinct understanding of their own visions for mission and ministry offline. As identified above, there are some churches in the Diocese of York that do not have a clear vision of what their mission is, or what the Missio Dei is, and how they might fit into that. In these churches, where ministry

seems to happen in a piecemeal fashion, it will be hard to show how there can be alignment between the church's offline mission and ministry and the potential of online mission and ministry. If they have no clear vision for their overall mission and ministry, they will be unable to see the potential of mission and ministry online.

Thankfully, this is not the case for all churches: many do have clear visions for of mission and ministry. For those churches, I predict training for their online religious authorities will be fruitful and will have a wider impact on the attitudes of the congregations.

This support could be offered in different ways for clergy and lay people, as their training pathways often differ. For clergy, a day on the uses of websites and social media as part of a church's mission and ministry could be offered as part of Initial Ministerial Education (IME) phase 2, which is for curates as they begin their public ordained ministry. Other elements of current IME phase 2 training, as described on the Diocese of York website, include healing and deliverance ministry, multi-church ministry, and hospital chaplaincy. Mission and ministry online could fit in well with the programme. Readers also engage in their own Initial Ministerial Education, which could involve similar training.

A longer course might be needed for the laity, in order to give a theological grounding which the clergy already have. This equipping would fit well into the Diocese's Recognised Parish Assistants (RPA) scheme. These Recognised Parish Assistants are described on the Diocese of York website as serving "in their local

context, in church, parish, chaplaincy and at work. Rooted locally, RPAs work with the support of their PCC and alongside other Christians”.

The course “begins by looking at how we share in God’s mission – what is God doing where we are, and how can we join in? We look at scriptural models for Christian discipleship and ministry. Seeking to grow in commitment and Christ-likeness we look at Jesus as servant and shepherd, at ourselves as the body of Christ. After this everyone spends four weeks together on an Acorn Christian Listening course. These skills may be directly applied in pastoral work, visiting, etc and are useful too in our common life. Good listening is key to our growing in partnership with others who share God’s work where we are”. All these understandings and skills would help the managers of the online spaces to align their work with the overall mission and ministry of the church.

Currently, the options for the second part of the RPA course include worship, pastoral work, mission including Fresh Expressions, and children and young people. Crucially, at the end of the course, a role description for the RPA is agreed with their home church, and recognition is given to their work. The website says that “the ‘Recognition’ happens in public worship to let the church see the variety of ministry that it is supporting”. This could be vital in pushing online mission and ministry and the authority of its facilitators up the hierarchy of visibility.

Part of this training, for both clergy and laity, should acknowledge that mission and ministry in online spaces is not, and should not be, solo work. In the online survey, 17 of the 20 participants already have other people from their church who also post

to or manage these accounts: online mission and ministry seems to be a team activity. Participants also expressed that it was difficult and time-consuming to run online spaces: one said they presumed the offline church valued their work as “no-one else [is] willing to take on the role”, and another expressed wariness to engage in more training as “I would ideally like to find another person to do this and I have other stuff to do”. In the Focus Group, P1 expressed the loneliness of this way of working, saying “I feel it’s me acting on my own”.

Even where there are other people to help, they may not be working as a team. P2 expressed that there were not consistent messages across her church’s online spaces, saying “It took some squirreling out who was the administrator for the ACNY one and the church website”. P3 admitted that he is “quite authoritarian”, saying “all these things have been set up so no-one can do anything on them apart from me and the person who I give the password to, and I have no qualms about deleting what she puts on, anything like that”. He also added, “I have more qualms asking someone to put up theological comments on the page than anything else. Because I think a parish has to be consistent in its theology. I would be very concerned with comments that people would put online, if they’re not according to my theological views they wouldn’t be on there”. However, P1 is a curate at the parish, and will presumably moving on in the next year or so. If the church wants to carry on their mission and ministry online, they will need to help others, perhaps lay people, manage their online spaces.

By creating and delivering IME training for clergy and Readers, and RPA training for lay people, I could make a real difference to the experiences of religious authorities

online. This training and support could help the religious authorities online have more confidence in themselves and more understanding of the nature and potential of online mission and ministry. This training would also enable the religious authorities online to share the value of their work with their congregations, allowing for more visibility of the church's mission and ministry online, more alignment between the church's offline mission and ministry and more recognition of their ministry and authority online.

However, there needs to be a wider recognition of the importance of online mission and ministry. The leadership of the Diocese of York and the wider Church of England need to recognise the growing role of online spaces in making and maintaining relationships with people and sharing Gospel messages with them. At a time when the Church of England is committed to the re-evangelisation of England in its Reform and Renewal programme, the role of digital religion could be crucial. This is especially relevant in the post-secular context recognised by Graham (2013). If religion is rising in the public sphere, it is especially important to help churches make the most of this opportunity in digital spaces. If religious authorities online can have more impact than traditional ones offline, the Church of England needs to commit to giving them equal support and training.

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Appendix 1

Responses from online survey. Participants names and churches have been anonymised.

What online presence does your church or benefice have?

Participant number	Website	Facebook page	Facebook group	Twitter account	A Church Near You entry	Other (please specify)
1	Yes				Yes	
2	Yes				Yes	Entry in benefice and deanery websites
3		Yes			Yes	
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
6	Yes	Yes			Yes	
7	Yes	Yes			Yes	
8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Blog
9		Yes			Yes	Email address, registered with PayPal Giving Fund (eBay for Charity)
10	Yes	Yes			Yes	We are in the process of updating ACNY

11	Yes	Yes		Yes		YouTube. Soundcloud.
12	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Prayer Book Society website entry
13		Yes		Yes		
14		Yes			Yes	
15	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
16	Yes	Yes			Yes	Vicar and curate's twitter account advertised on the website
17	Yes	Yes			Yes	
18	Yes	Yes			Yes	
19	Yes				Yes	
20	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	

Which of these spaces do you manage?

Participant number	Website	Facebook page	Facebook group	Twitter account	A Church Near You entry	Other (as in previous question)
1	Yes					
2	Yes					Yes
3		Yes				
4	Yes	Yes	Yes			
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		

6	Yes	Yes			Yes	
7		Yes				
8	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
9		Yes			Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes				
11		Yes		Yes		Yes
12	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
13		Yes		Yes		
14		Yes				
15	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
16		Yes		Yes		
17		Yes				
18	Yes				Yes	
19	Yes				Yes	
20	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	

Does anyone else manage other pages on behalf of your church?

Participant number	Comment
1	ACNY is managed by congregation members, but I have access
2	Yes
3	PCC Secretary manages A Church near you
4	Yes
5	Yes - shared responsibility with the Parish Administrator
6	Facebook page owner died recently - I'm one of a team of editors, and the only really active one
7	Yes - the website and CNY are looked after by other folk.

8	Yes, 3 others
9	Helen Audley manages the PayPal Giving Fund, she co-administers the email & Facebook page
10	Yes, our PCC Secretary
11	Yes. Neal the vicar does Twitter with me. And our church secretary manages the website.
12	Yes - one lay person, who is technologically savvy and (co-incidentally) our PCC Secretary and youth group leader
13	No
14	
15	No
16	Yes
17	Vicar submits info for A Church Near You. Kirkby & Ingleby Greenhow have village websites that include basic information about the churches.
18	Yes - Facebook - Vicar`s wife
19	Benefice website - no Parish ACNY page - no
20	Yes, I am more of an assistant although I was the primary person for starting Facebook and Twitter for our church.

Do you have a formal role in the church?

Participant number	Clergy	Reader	Churchwarden	PCC Member	Other (please specify)
1	Yes				
2			Yes	Yes	Treasurer, Editor of Parish magazine
3				Yes	Deputy Church Warden, Safeguarding Representative

4	Yes				
5					Youth Worker
6					PCC Secretary - not a member of the Anglican church
7	Yes				
8	Yes				
9			Yes		
10		Yes		Yes	
11	Yes				
12	Yes				
13				Yes	Youth group leader/ safeguarding officer
14				Yes	Recognised Parish Assistant
15					No Formal role within the church
16	Yes				
17				Yes	
18				Yes	PCC Treasurer
19				Yes	
20				Yes	I was churchwarden but I am also an RPA.

Have you received any training to equip you for managing an online space on behalf of the church? This could be theological training as a clergy person or Reader, or training on how to use social media spaces.

Participant number	Comment
1	Yes. Various training courses on social media and communication
2	IT training as part of job.
3	Only meeting with Eleanor
4	No
5	Yes
6	A couple of Theology courses and your workshop on social media. A very basic course in Web design.
7	Yes - from the Diocese
8	No
9	1 day workshop with Dr Bex Lewis on social media at Diocesan House.
10	No
11	At theological college (Cranmer) we had some Twitter training.
12	One hour session on how to manage the Church website (via Wordpress) provided by the website designers (LaserRed)
13	Yes
14	RPA training
15	Workshop on setting up church website and facebook page
16	Yes, an evening with the dioc communications officer a day event in 2014
17	Yes social media training via Anglican voices
18	No - background in IT
19	One group session arranged by Diocese
20	I have attended courses run by Premier Radio and also by the York Diocese with Eleanor Course and Bex Lewis.

Do you have any experience outside the church in managing an online space which helps you with this role?

Participant number	Comment
1	Yes, previous experience designing and updating a company website
2	Yes - used to manage Creative Arts Retreat Movement (CARM) website.
3	No
4	No - just some good conversations with friends
5	Yes - my other role is as a freelance marketing consultant.
6	Run websites for brass band and related association
7	No - only as a user of Facebook.
8	No
9	No professional experience
10	Not really. Only managing my own Facebook page very infrequently.
11	Not really, but being a journalist in my former life has helped.
12	Designed and published website for Common Room at theological college; personal use of Facebook and Twitter
13	Yes through working with social services
14	Previous job role in marketing/communications
15	Yes I manage other facebook pages have previously setup and run a website
16	No
17	Yes, website, FB account and twitter account through my work with Church Urban Fund
18	No
19	No
20	No

Would you welcome further teaching or training on managing a church website or social media site? If so, what could this entail?

Participant number	Yes/No	Comment
1	Yes	It would be good to keep abreast of what is happening on social media and hear updates
2	Yes	Making websites more responsive and mobile-friendly.
3	Yes	Any new developments
4	Yes	A 'roadshow' rolled out to deaneries.
5	Yes	How to gain more followers on Facebook. Best practice.
6	Yes	More technical training to enable more effective website design
7	Yes	A one-to-one session on how to improve it, and the skills needed to achieve this, with ideas from other pages to help visualise the possibilities.
8	Yes	I'm not sure to be honest. A lot of it seems rather intuitive to me, though I would be open to ideas on doing things better.
9	Yes	Further workshops to follow on from the introductory day to look at the at creating & managing of a variety of e-spaces more closely in individual 'how to' sessions and include evaluating their use & effectiveness. These could be conducted in traditional form at Diocesan House, in a group online conference via Skype or similar, or by the use of e-learning materials remotely accessed online individually.
10	Yes	I think a local training session, even just dedicated to our website would be most helpful. If such an event could be held it would be helpful to invite other members of the church to attend, so there could be several people who had the knowledge to manage the web site. It would also be helpful to know what other website formats were available as our current site doesn't come across as terribly 'exciting'.
11	Yes	Workshops on not just how churches can use social media etc but how it can be used missionally. Examples

		of good practice to be circulated regularly via the diocese links.
12	Yes	It would be useful to have more people within the parish able to manage our online presence - but many do not have computers, and those that do have only a basic grasp on them.
13	Yes	How to get our church noticed more.
14	Yes	Setting up a church website Setting up multiple twitter accounts Convincing and training others to take part.
15	Yes	Keeping things relevant and working within church guidelines on content
16	Yes	I am considering asking a professional company to set up a modern website for us, which provide ongoing support and training as necessary.
17	Yes	I think we would welcome this as a church as we want to maximise our social media presence e.g. develop twitter account.
18	No	Guarded - as I would ideally like to find another person to do this and I have other stuff to do.
19	Yes	On-line training programme or interactive group sessions.
20	No	I have put no simply because I found that the church in the main is not very responsive and in some cases regards it has a threat.

Do you think your church considers your role in managing an online space important? Why do you think this is?

Participant number	Comment
1	No. Most of the regular congregation use paper-based communication as their primary way of getting information. However, fringe members are far more likely to access online information.
2	Yes. Gives us presence and identity online. Informs locals and congregation. Brings visitors to us and adds to collections.

3	Some do but others do not understand use of social media
4	Yes and no - they like having a website and know people come to us though the website. I don't think they have any idea how time consuming it is.
5	There is a growing acceptance of the need for social media but limited skills and expertise within the church family in our parish.
6	I think they think that having a website (at least) is important - it shows that the church is doing its bit! I don't think they really have much idea about the Facebook side of things. And I suspect they think it all runs itself!
7	Not really - most of them don't use facebook and don't really understand why it's important to have a presence on it. They understand the website as the concept is older.
8	Yes, we have a lot of people making contact through Facebook and the Website. Though we do use other methods of communication (radio, fliers, posters, word of mouth) we recognize that social media has a much more immediate impact and perhaps even further reach for us. We are connecting with people who of course already use social media extensively and are happy to make the most of this method of communication. We also appreciate that a 'like' on our Facebook page isn't the same as getting involved in the life of the church, though some eventually do. We have advertised a number of new initiatives through Facebook and have had a fantastic response.
9	Not fully. Some use Facebook, but only for family 'chit chat'. There are some who are still struggling with email and are as afraid of opening their devices up to social media as they are of opening up to other people.
10	Many of our members are elderly and not terribly internet 'savvy'. I wouldn't go so far as saying that the church is 'indifferent' to our web site but at best they have a 'passive' response to it. It is not a topic discussed very frequently, even at our PCC meetings. Only very occasionally, do we get a response on our website from our community - usually someone wanting a baptism. We have accumulated 20+ likes on our Facebook page over a period of about 2 years.
11	Increasingly so. Our Some of our lovely golden oldies are still suspicious of the Internet but people coming to church as a result of our online presence has helped change attitudes.

12	Yes: it is understood as a vital mission tool, but one which they are unable to manage themselves because they don't understand the technology.
13	Yes everyone enjoys seeing the page and follow it.
14	Very few of our regular church attenders are interested - they do not have on-line presence themselves. I feel supported by my vicar - she is aware that those on the edge of our church do keep up to date with posting, although she herself has no input.
15	Yes. The church is changing and the way the message gets out is more and more through social media and websites.
16	Some do - (younger generation - i.e. under 60 in church terms!) Many can't see the point.
17	Yes, most of the PCC see that our social media presence is really important and add/post to the site, some older members don't see the significance.
18	Usually welcomed across those who use the web as another channel for letting people know about our church. How important is difficult to judge - not recognised within PCC structure. Keep getting likes on Facebook and that links to website.
19	Probably - as no-one else willing to take on the role! Benefice pays annual fee for Benefice website hosting. Regular requests to insert items into Benefice website from constituent parishes.
20	No. A shortage of Faith and loads of fear.

Appendix 2

Email sent to online survey participants on Tuesday 8th September 2015.

Participants names and churches have been anonymised.

Dear all,

Thank you so much for your help with my MA research on online authority and influence, whether you took part in the online survey or in the focus group. Some of you have expressed interest in what my research found, so I wanted to update you, and give you a chance to critique or comment on my findings.

My (very condensed!) findings so far:

- People who are authorities and influencers in churches' online spaces already have roles of authority or influence in the 'real world' church. This is the case whether they are clergy or laity – lay members tended to be churchwardens or PCC members.
- However, not all of those online authorities and influencers feel the offline church recognises their work online. The variety in whether they were supported or not was about the same for clergy and lay participants.
- Most people who are online authorities and influencers have had training or experience that helps them use online spaces. They are technologically or media literate.
- However, they have had less training or experience to help them use these spaces as part of the churches' mission and ministry. They feel they do not

have the theological literacy or articulacy to do this. This is perhaps especially true of the laity.

- In many cases, the church's online presence is divorced from the mission and ministry of the offline church. This seems to be because it is not seen or understood by members of the congregation or PCC. This can lead to the people who manage these online spaces not being valued or supported in this ministry.

My argument:

- If the church is to fully embrace the potential of online spaces, the people who manage those spaces need to be given more support to help them do so.
- This support should be to enable people, especially the laity, to be more theologically articulate and literate in a social media context, and as representatives of the church
- The offline church needs to recognise the role of online spaces in mission and ministry, and needs to support the people who manage those spaces.
- Support need to be given to make online spaces more visible, and their uses translated, to people in church.

What do you think? Does this sound about right for your context? Is there anything I've got wrong, missed or misunderstood?

Response from online survey participant 20, Tuesday 8th September:

As someone previously involved in online presence I agree entirely with your findings.

Response from online survey participant 8, Tuesday 8th September::

I suppose deep down I believe that our online presence exists only to serve the church community of (name), gathered in real spaces and not virtual ones, though I have been so impressed with the way people respond to information we have posted on Facebook and to some extent on Twitter. I appreciate my view might be seen as slightly dismissive of the greater potential in social media for building the Church. I have for a long time simply seen it as a great communication tool but that's all - I haven't been trying to create a virtual church, nor do I think I should. I am somewhat suspicious of promoting an 'online community' as I tend to think of it as a kind of disembodied church or even a gnostic church, meaning one that has separated the physical from the spiritual and one that people can accept on their own terms. The Church is a body - social media is brilliant don't get me wrong, but it is not the same as gathering human beings together into a physical space. I do use technology to pray as well, whether that technology is a book or an ipad - they can help me draw closer to God and to others, even if I am not physically in the same room with others. But that can't be my main form of worship - my main form of worship must involve other human beings actually present with me in the same room, and instinct built into the Book of Common Prayer where it does not allow a priest to celebrate Holy Communion unless someone is actually present with him. I think that one of the indicators of the difference between the actual and the virtual is by looking carefully at the way people behave sometimes on Facebook - responding in such a way that is offensive or even full of hate and anger, behaving in a way that they wouldn't if they were physically present. Is it also something to do with avatar culture that I also find difficult to accept? It's disembodied and anonymous (at least in the way it is experienced) - and comments on Facebook or Youtube, where religion is the topic

(or just about anything that gets the blood pumping really), show that dialogue may be possible and real communication make take place...but rarely! However, I do know that people can behave appallingly even face to face, but the virtual space feels a bit more like talking about church rather than being church...IMHO (sorry)

Response from online survey participant 17, Sunday 20th September:

This sounds about right I think, for me the big question is "is social media just a notice board or a tool for mission?", I think it can be the latter but that's where the training and understanding is needed.

Appendix 3

Transcript of focus group held on Thursday 20th August 2015, Wydale Hall.

Participants names and churches have been anonymised.

Researcher – Firstly, I think what would be helpful for each other but also for me is a reminder of what your church has in terms of an online presence, and what it is that you do within that.

P1 - So we have obviously an entry on A Church Near You (ACNY) and I don't have anything to do with that whatsoever. We do have a Facebook page which is one that I set up and I run it and I'm the sole administrator of it and what goes on there is all down to me.

Researcher – Do you have a website as well?

P1 - We don't have a website, no. We have details on a deanery website which I know for a long time we've said we're going to update it at some point.

P2 - We're on Churches Together, sorry, ACNY, we have a section on our local Churches Together site, we have our own website and we have a Facebook page which again is my sole pleasure and responsibility.

Researcher – Do you manage any of the other entries, the ACNY page?

P2 – No, I don't. It took some squirreling out who was the administrator for the ACNY one and the church website as well, so probably, yeah.

P3 - We have a website which I manage in conjunction with the company we employ to... We have a Facebook page and Twitter account both of which I manage. We have an entry on the Visit Ryedale page which I manage and an entry on the Prayer Book Society page which I manage and something else as well, Twitter, and that's it.

Researcher – Does anybody else manage those sites in conjunction with you? You mentioned you have a company that does the website. Do you have anyone who helps with the Twitter page or Facebook?

P3 – Well, one other person. We're on ACNY too.

Researcher – So what do you see as the role of church websites and social media sites?

P1 - I think it's to reach out to people who don't get to our church regularly, who have got an interest and you do get people, quite a broad selection of people turning up who are linked in with us, whether it's just the local people who are Facebook savvy or whether its people that are visiting the area and see the Facebook page, people might send in enquiries about ancestry and things like that. And holiday-makers I know have come to the church because they've found the Facebook page and seen when the services are. So you know it's quite diverse, more diverse than the parish magazine going out on a mailing list of those local addresses and that's it.

P2 – Yes, I think, for me it's about getting information out there reminding folk about what's going on and being a bit more informal and chatty than the website page which is very formal in set up. And trying to engage folk as well, which isn't very successful at the moment, so I'm happy for some tips on that, but trying to get people to respond. But yes, to get people to know that it's there. That's been the hardest bit – "oh, you've got a Facebook page?", people keep saying. Yes! To get the information out there. And people are checking their phones every day. It's a way of putting it in front of them. So I try and post something nearly every day.

P3 – I think the way we use ours is very much related to the community and the use of the church, the physical church as it were. So a lot of our community are elderly and not on the internet, let alone Facebook and Twitter, and we've put a Facebook and Twitter feed on our home page which is much easier to direct people to and we use that partly to put out information, although I don't think that quite reaches the regular congregation, but also to celebrate what the parish is doing. So I put up, I try to put up quite a lot of photos and it gets the people who don't actually use Facebook very often logging on to look at their photo or someone else's photo. And it's a way of celebrating the life of the community, internally. And I think it's also a way of showing what's going on with the church, and we have a large tourist ministry and when I first arrived at the church there was a great disconnect between, I suppose, the active life of the worshipping community and the building, and although people would look online to see who was the churchwarden, that sort of thing, the creation, the use of the social media has linked those people who are on the fringes of church, the people living in the town who appreciate the church because it's the

town church, lots of tourists and visitors, it's linked that with what goes on weekly, on a daily basis in terms of worship, study, and everything else that goes on in parish life. And so it's a way of showing that the church isn't just a building but it's actually a community, and I think it's important to link that together.

Researcher – So what do you actually do as the manager of these sites? P2 mentioned trying to post something at least once every day. What is it that you do? What's the pattern of posting?

P3 – It's quite sporadic really, when I've got time. Sometimes, it depends how important the event is and who I think the audience is, and if I think the website or Facebook or internet thing will be useful, I use it as a tool to get to the audience. So quirky and unusual things that we do as well, basic information about times and services, rotas, they're online, different things like that. I think it just depends on the situation.

P2 - Once I discovered you could schedule posts I only have to do it once a week which is fantastic. I also signed us up to like lots of other pages, but now Facebook's stuck them on a separate stream, so they don't appear in the same place anymore. So, like, the Diocesan page, wider church, charities we're involved with, trying to get people to reading other, wider things as well, it's more an online, in your face noticeboard at the moment. And reporting on events and putting pictures on. Trying to get people to extend a community. They're already doing it with other things on Facebook, so why shouldn't we.

P1 - It's quite sporadic, I have to say. And I hadn't really thought about scheduling events like you're saying. I do try to – we've just had a social committee meeting, and lots of events planned between now and Christmas so I've gone right, create an event, invite people to it, let them know what's going on, fundraising stuff, whether it's Harvest festivals, also the benefice, if you can't come to this one come to that one. I try to flag up what's happening around the benefice not just our own parish. So it is the regular worship patterns and stuff, but then what you were saying about photos, when the school have come in and done things we've tried to talk about those and put information on because obviously you get a lot of the younger members of the community saying "oh yes, my little darling's an angel". So a good flow of information really. And as you were saying, about linking to charities that we support, any fundraising we do.

Researcher – We've touched on this a bit already, but what do you think the relationships are between the online church presence and the offline church? It sounds as though it's an integral part, so far, from what you are saying. Do you feel the two are linked?

P3 - Yes. I do. But I would perceive the online to be feeding the offline. And then to the celebrating offline with the online. I don't think the online is a replacement. About ten years ago, I don't know if it's still going, there was the idea of virtual church, and Ship of Fools and things like that. Well I wouldn't perceive that as an alternative, I think it's very much a complement and celebration.

P2 - I think it's for people who are on the ground, who are local, to have things in

front of them so they can't say they didn't know, but also for people who have perhaps been in the church but moved away, or friends of people, or people who have visited the church, they can keep that link, and it keeps us in mind if they see activities. As you say, it's reminding people that church isn't just a building. Like yours, ours is a big tourist church and I don't think we quite yet make the most of that, because I don't think the PCC particularly understand what Facebook is. And they let me set it up, but they're a bit unsure really.

Researcher – In terms of the mission and ministry, of the church and the Facebook page, do you think these are aligned?

P2 – (*Pauses.*) In my head they are. But there is a disconnect between the Facebook page and the website because that's someone else's, it's very much their baby, hands off, yeah, so it's quite difficult that I operate independently of the church website. I don't think they've got a link to our Facebook page. (*Laughs.*)

P1 – I think the physical church and the people within it who are the regulars, have no connection to the Facebook page whatsoever. There are very few of the congregation, and it's a very old congregation, there are two or three, and I have to say, on the PCC, it's "ooh, the Facebook page! It's yours! It's fine, you do it!" There's no support, no offer of support, no questions of what I should do with it, I would like to think you could develop it and do more contemplative comments and invite some more conversation through it, "what did you think of the sermon today? The reading was this, what did you think about that?" I'd love to develop it into that, but I don't think I've got the support to do that and I'm a bit wary about doing it myself

as a lay person. (*Stutters:*) I could have a go... I'm worried not so much that I couldn't do it... (*sounds more relaxed:*) it's the time it would take to do it, for me. It's the time it would take to do it regularly.

Researcher – That moves on to my next question, in a way. Do you feel you have an authority or influence on that Facebook page? Do you feel you're the authority in that page?

P1 – (*Pauses.*) I'm pretty certain that if I said I was going to do something with it everyone would be, you know, ok, be fine. They wouldn't mind, I'd have to do something completely crazy with it for anybody to go "ooh, what's she doing there?" you know. I think they're very trusting in me to just get on and do it, and if there was anything that I thought, well, it's like those explorations in doing more conversation, I'm wary about that, I think I'd have to have a lot of conversation with my vicar before I start doing it and trialling it. I'm sure if I said "shall we do it" it'd be "go for it". So yeah, I think I've got authority, no-one's stopping me, I think they're quite happy someone is doing it! (*Laughs*)

P2 – I don't think mine understand it really, which is odd, if I stopped doing it tomorrow, nobody would notice, I suspect. Because like you, you're enthusiastic and think it's a good thing to be doing, we do it. But then when I move on as curate, finding someone else to take it on, like yourself, to keep it running, if it's thought to be worthwhile. How do you get through to people for whom it's really alien, that this is actually worthwhile?

P3 - I've found that statistics are very useful. With the creation of our new website, part of it, we wanted to receive statistics which we couldn't do with the previous website, and we use Google analytics which is a free tool, we don't pay for it, and, I don't know how to set it up, they set it up for me, so I can see how many hits the website has had, and all sort of statistics about the people who've looked at the website, and Facebook uses statistics and Twitter, and everything from how many people are basic followers to where they're coming from, whether they are new people. And that's been really good because it's shown quite an insular community the widespread appeal of the social media and the website. So I think we get about 40 hits a day with the website, of which three-quarters are new hits, we've had people from all across the world, people who have a relative, or there are people who have relatives in the congregation who live in Australia. They know what happen in church quicker than the people who live in the parish because they're seeing it online all the time. And it creates discussion between them and their relatives, and that's good in its own way. So I think in that sense, statistics have been great. We have our registers and can tell how many people come to church, and if I can say we've got 500 followers on Twitter, and I say that every time I put out a tweet, 500 people will see that. It blows their minds away actually. And because they don't know much about it we can manipulate the statistics quite well! *(Laughs.)*

Researcher – So do you feel you have a role of influence and authority in those online spaces?

P3 – Completely. And all these things have been set up so no-one can do anything on them apart from me and the person who I give the password to, and I have no

qualms about deleting what she puts on, anything like that. I think it's a very public image of the church, and there are things you can't have control over, and there's a danger with that. But if you keep tight control over it it's less likely to spiral out of control.

Researcher – One of the things that I'm interested in is, and I think it's difficult to tell this from three people in one room, but whether that feels different for the laity, whether it is easier for clergy to say "I have a traditional role of authority in this church, yes I am in control". Whereas with your answer, there was a sense of "no-body would stop me", but perhaps there's less confidence in your authority. Is that a fair comment?

P1 – Yes, I'm wary of it. In some respects, it's great that they trust me to do it, but I just wonder if a) they know what it is I'm doing, and b), if I did something they didn't like, you know, what would happen?

Researcher – Would you consider yourself to have a role of authority and influence, although that's my choice of words, in the church in general, separate from the Facebook page?

P1 – Yes, I'm on the PCC and I'm a RPA (*Recognised Parish Assistant*) as well, so obviously that authority has been built up over years, and anything to do with children and youth ministry they look to me, so I think they see it as an extension of, "oh, it's Facebook, it's something that the young people do, therefore she knows what she's talking about".

Researcher – Would you say, and it's again my choice of words, that you, as a curate, have role of authority and influence in the church offline, as well as in the online church?

P2 – Whether I think I have them or not is irrelevant, because people give you that, whether you necessarily want it or not, they see you in that role.

Researcher – But do you feel it?

P2 – Do I feel it? Yes. Because it's reflected back. People expect things of you, treat you differently whether you like it or not. And that's an interesting place *(laughs)*.

P1 – I would reflect on that with my previous career in corporate life. You know where you are in a structure, in a management structure, and you are bound by your job role, and you don't have that in a church setting, and it's like, I'm seeking permission to do stuff, I don't know who to ask, I don't know who should be saying yes to it. Ok, I've got my incumbent and the PCC, but if you're stepping outside of the realms of what they know, like I'm in children and youth ministry, what should they do, where should they go, it's very much stepping into the unknown and no-one really stopping you doing it. Its keep going until someone says stop, almost. It's a strange, it's completely different to the business world. That's something that's taken me a long time to get my head round, the way we do things in church is "talk to people, pray, get on with it!" *(laughs)*. You're not necessarily going to get a rubber

stamp as they say “yes, go ahead and do it”. But you do find that network of people that are supportive.

Researcher – Within your roles of influence, both as an RPA and in the children and youth work and in the Facebook page, do you think that your authority and influence is respected by the church?

P1 – I think it is, because you suddenly find you’re treated as an expert in things and people seek your opinion about stuff.

Researcher – I suppose the flip side of that is do you feel supported?

P1 – Um, yes. Yes. Mostly. There are some times when you think you’re just expected to do it and people expect things to happen, but there are a lot of people who are around and being supportive, making sure you don’t do too much. People do recognise, I think, how much effort goes into things and appreciate how much time is spent.

Researcher – Do you think that’s the same for the children and youth work as it is for the Facebook page?

P1 – No. I don’t. I don’t think the Facebook page gets that recognition at all. But certainly the work I do with the physical church, physically with children and youth, that’s recognised.

Researcher – Would you hazard a guess as to why that might be?

P1 – Because it's there, it's physical, they're seeing it. They're seeing the change in the church that's happening in church in the children's corner, they're seeing that I look after them on a Sunday, trying to do other events and what have you, so they're seeing that. So, as an aging community that isn't particularly online, they don't see it. And I guess unless people are marching in and going "well I'm here because I saw something on Facebook", they're not going to recognise it.

Researcher – P2, you're nodding there. Does that sound familiar?

P2 – Yes, you're visible, your children and youth work is visible, therefore it's valued, because if it wasn't there it would be noticed. But I think you're noticed, people wouldn't notice if Facebook wasn't there. Um, because its influence is very different to the physical church. But of course that doesn't mean that it's less valuable, it's just more unseen. I suppose the work of the mission committee, if you have such a thing, similarly, it would be noticed if it wasn't there. It's almost as if there is a hierarchy of visibility. If it happens on a Sunday morning, people notice it. If it happens on a weeknight, fewer people know about it. If it happens in the internet, in the web, then it's not real in quite the same way for people.

Researcher – Asking the same questions to you – as a curate, you do 101 different jobs in the church-

P2 – And only working one day a week! (*Laughs.*)

Researcher – Do you feel as though the role you have with the Facebook page is as valued and supported as some of your other work?

P2 – No. Again, it's a bit niche. It's something I asked to do, and people were a bit "well what do you want to do that for? Haven't you got enough to do?" But actually no, because this is important, I perceive it's important, we should be doing this because, no it's not all seen in the same light. Even the website is seen as a thing that sits there, it's a thing that somebody does, it's very nice, we don't really engage with that.

Researcher – P3, what about you? I'm wondering if there's a slight difference here. Do you feel that the work you do with your online presence is as valued and supported as some of the other curate work that you do?

P3 – Um, yes, I think you're right, it is. I'd probably echo some of the things that have I've been saying about its part of the work, and its valued as much as and supported by my congregation, even if they don't understand it or use it. Because, I think, I can tell them the story of why it's important. And I think the fact that they've bought that, not wanting to sound like a used car salesman, but the fact they've bought that is good, I get the support I want. For instance, when we created the new website I managed to, we had a website designer who was very hard to get hold of, and she had to do everything to change the website, we're now on a Wordpress website where I can amend and do basic things which is excellent, but it took a lot to, well it didn't that a lot to convince them that we needed a new website because we

obviously needed a new one, and they were very happy to spend four, five thousand pounds on a new website, and that was from a particular fund, we didn't have that money just lying around to create new websites all the time (*laughs*) it was from a restricted fund. But it was used for that and they were perfectly happy for that to happen, no arguments whatsoever.

Researcher – Is they the PCC?

P3 – Yes, the PCC. What was more difficult, though not with the website, but just generally in (name of town) is convincing people that things need to be professional. I mean, like I was saying earlier about the importance of, the notion of being online means you have to step things up a gear and you're selling a church, it's like press releases and all sorts of things, you've got to be slick and what it should be like. Where as in (name of town) there's the coffee debate, we don't have real proper coffee, we have Nescafe which is fine, but it's "that will do". So with the website, I was very clear that that won't do. So we set up an argument for PCC, we got quotes in and we assessed the different quotes, and what they provided, we explained the process to the PCC and why we suggested using a particular designer, and we showed examples of their work and different things, and that's why they went for it. Because they were told, they understood the story of the importance of it.

Researcher – We've talked about how the Facebook page and website are used, but the Facebook page is perhaps a little disjointed from the mission and ministry of the whole church. Within the context of the whole church, do you feel you have the

ability or authority to make those online spaces part of the mission and ministry of the whole church? I think your answer (to P3) would be “it sort of is actually”. Is that right?

P3 – It depends how you interpret your question. Yes, it is. But if mission is about the congregation being missional, or whatever the word is, as well, then actually this is something I've kept, rather than something I've... I think because of the importance and because it's new, I think that's one way in which the priest might be a leader in mission. When I leave, the vicar isn't terribly technologically literate, so I think we're going to have to find someone who can do that sort of thing and who understands it, but yes, it is part of the whole church community, but in a way that it is provided for them at the moment.

Researcher – What about you? Do you feel you would have the authority or ability within the wider church to say this is part of the integral ministry and mission?

P2 – I think so. The first hurdle for me was getting the PCC to say yes, and say yes it was something they wanted. Technically I think it's still on a trial period, but no-one's come back to it so it's been a case of very softly softly, let's get it out there. I was so thrilled the other day, I went on and we'd got 50 likes, but it had gone down to 49! (*Laughs*) I thought great! But we started with me and my family and friends. So yes, I want it to be and feel it ought to be, and could be, and certainly if anyone's going to do that it will be me.

P1 – I think... it's difficult. Unless I can get the demographics of the church

changing I think it's going to be quite difficult to make it integral... I think it's because people know it's me as well, locally, they know it's me running it. I know, because I put something up, and people say "Sarah, what's happening with that?"

Researcher – Why is that an issue then, if it's you that does it? Why bring this up here?

P1 – 'Cos I feel it's me acting on my own, I guess. It is down to me doing it, and although I'm linked, I'm part of the mission of the church, I know that, but I'm out on a limb! (*Laughs!*)

P3 - There is something in that, being ordained you go from baptisms to weddings to funerals, with children, with the elderly, you do the whole spectrum of it, and you can celebrate it all, you can use the online to celebrate it all. Whereas if you're only on children and youth, I mean, I don't know what you put up on Facebook, but there might well be a children and youth bias, perhaps? Or just things you're involved with?

P1 – No, no, it's everything. It's absolutely everything that I put on. You know, whether it's Thursday's funeral, or the baptisms and the folk there, wasn't the church decorated beautifully for the wedding, congratulations, you know, I try to cover everything and everything we're doing.

P3 - But do you feel more confident posting things which you're involved with, rather than the things you've just been told about?

P1 – No, I think... I'm a member of that community, so I know the people that are involved in it, generally. It's not a lack of confidence on my part.

Researcher – Could it be... and I might be pushing an agenda here... I wonder if you (C) find it a little easier because you are ordained? Part of that natural church hierarchy?

P1 – (*Murmurs assent*) Yes, it's like that should I be making more commentary on the content of the services, or should I be making... I don't want it to sound like it's my opinion as just... just a lay person...

Researcher – I was hoping to have more lay people here so it isn't just P1 who is representative of the entire laity of the church, but there is something about the skills needed. You have the skills needed, the media literacy to use the space but also... I've put it as theological ability, but I think its theological confidence, actually?

P1 – I think it's probably confidence, that's a good way of putting it, theological confidence.

Researcher – Do you feel that you have both media confidence to know how Facebook works, but also theological confidence?

P1 – I've got the media confidence, I think, in a way. I use social media for my own purposes, I can tick that box, and obviously from my previous background in PR and

marketing communications I can tick that box, which is probably why I've been left to get on with it because "she knows what she's doing" in the mechanics of it, but... the... the theological confidence is probably less so because I personally feel I'm still finding my way, almost! You're not having anyone tell you it, I'm still having those "aha!" moments. I know everyone still does, but you know.

Researcher – What about you, P2?

P2 - Yes, because my experience of Facebook was as a user, so of course you then think "how difficult is it to run a page, what does it involve, oh I could probably do that" and so you work your way into it, like most things like that. I don't really comment anything theologically at all, at the moment, and I don't know why, actually. I think probably because I'm just trying to get people interested in it, or maybe they'd be more interested in it if I did! Maybe I'm missing the point, or what's going to get people where they're at, to include more commentary. But the issue we have as a parish is we have three separate congregations, so it's very difficult to comment, you can only comment on a third of what's going on, so that does complicate things, and the home groups do different things and they don't even do a set thing, so it's all quite disparate. Which is good. It's an odd one really. Where do you begin?

P1 – I would refer to an experience I had just last week, where I have my own personal twitter account, and I've just started using the daily reflections app, and there was a comment in there by Martin Percy, who I'd never heard of before, and I made a comment, I can't remember exactly what it was saying, something about sharing ministry, and you've got to share it, and it was something we'd been saying

at Deanery youth, so I tweeted something, and a vicar in a neighbouring parish said “you want to be careful who you tweet or retweet within your little group in the Deanery”, and offline, privately after that I was like “why?” and this particular person, Martin Percy, was apparently not liked in some circles, and I’m like (arms out in surprise) or it’d upset someone else, or he’d made some upsetting comments that I’d never heard of, and I was just like, “I’ve only retweeted something that I’ve read in church!” You feel like, ooh, I don’t feel as prepared and able to respond if people respond negatively, I was just like that was a really good comment. *(Laughs.)*

P2 - But there’s that whole issue of church politics. And you can accidentally wander into and cause great upset and offense.

P1 – But then I’m not shy of doing that, either. I’ve been known to shout up at Deanery Synod about things. So it’s odd that you can do it in person, but the danger of doing it online to people that perhaps follow you that you’ve got no idea, particularly Twitter, I’m still very nervous about Twitter, that people follow you and you just go “I don’t know who you are”. I find it quite creepy. *(Laughs.)*

P3 - You can have a “if you follow me, I’ll have to approve you” listing, ‘cos I’ve got one of those.

P1 – That’s maybe something I’m still learning about. And my Twitter account, it’s not so much my social life, it is more about commentary on children and youth work, schools work as I work in a school, it’s more my professional life if you like, rather than my social life. Different crowd of people that I’m associating with. Yes, I’m

wary.

Researcher – I asked the other two about a balance of theological confidence and media confidence. I think you were saying media confidence yes, theological confidence yes, a reasonably high level of both for you. Where would you feel on that?

P3 – I'm completely confident in both. I'm still learning, I can use Facebook and Twitter how I want to use it, for church. But we've been talking about doing a Wikipedia page, that's something I've never done, and I've had the first attempt rejected, so I don't know anything about Wikipedia, it's a case of learning. We've spent a long time working this out and it's been rejected, the whole thing, it's still delayed.

P2 - And it's frustrating when Facebook does something, changes something, and you're "where's it gone?" And that can slow you down, when you're used to going on and doing X, and it's completely different, that's really frustrating.

P3 – That's worrying, if, when the mantle's handed on, you can show someone how to do something, and the moment it changes, and it's the most simple changes that can be the most confusing, with a computer screen as well as with anything, so getting someone to run a Facebook feed, they've have to be pretty, they'll have to be immersing in it, to understand how it works, rather than saying you know...

Theoretically one could say to a parish secretary "here's our Facebook account".

Not that we have a parish secretary. But then, if that parish secretary can type out a

log but can't quite understand Facebook, then there's going to be a problem there.

Researcher – There's one last thing I'd like to ask. This might be prejudice on my part, or barking up the wrong tree... but I wonder if there's something about the ecclesiology of a church, and how they approach social media spaces. (To P3) I'm guessing that you're from the highest tradition church in the room, but if the ecclesiology of the church does have that... what might be stereotyped as a... not clergy led because I know the laity are massively important in (*name of town*), but where there might be a more traditional view of church authority, where something that the curate gets involved in might be more part of the church than somewhere else, with a lower ecclesiology? Is that a stereotype?

P3 - I think the difference is probably in approach insofar as I would say that personally, not anything to do with my congregation, I'm quite authoritarian, so I have no problem in leading. And I have more problems in delegating. And I think that can happen at the other end of the spectrum as well, with anyone, but I think it's a personality thing rather than a tradition thing. But I think you're probably right, being from the Anglo-Catholic tradition there is a natural role for the priest in the community there, that doesn't have to be forged out. But again, the delegation thing, it may well relate, but I think it's a personality thing as well. I have more qualms asking someone to put up theological comments on the page than anything else. Because I think a parish has to be consistent in its theology. I would be very concerned with comments that people would put online, if they're not according to my theological views they wouldn't be on there. Not saying I have personal theological views, but I think teaching has to be consistent and clear, and while

discussion can be useful, there's not a clearer way of responding as there is in person to theological discussion, and you see these rants people have on Twitter, one post after another, and then people misunderstand, and misinterpret, and you end up digging a hole, and then all things can happen. It's easier not to happen in that forum, almost. I don't publish my sermons online either, and I'm not keen to do so.

Researcher – What about you? Is the tradition, or personality, where do they have a role to play?

P2 - I think in my parish, there are... and I will stereotype them as little old ladies... who have a certain deference, to me, even as informal as I am, I am still the curate and that matters to them. And then at the other end of the spectrum there are folk who just happen to come along to our ten o'clock service which just happens to be part of an Anglican church, but they've no idea, really, what I am, beyond a person standing at the front in a dog collar. So there's that whole interconnected spectrum of respect and just people from free church backgrounds to whom I'm just a person to them, so there is a very mixed idea of what my role actually is, which in your situation (to P3) is probably clearer and I don't think that's a bad thing, necessarily. But there is a much broader understanding of who I am by dint of being the curate, and I think that does feed through into all sorts of ways, yes. So some people will feel free to ignore anything I've said because I'm just a person, whereas at the other end, there's "well the curate's said it so it must be right". And it's quite a tension to hold together, which is probably why I've avoided going into theological stuff online. And because we've got these three very different congregations, I mean, we've got

BCP Matins, Common Worship middle of the road, although they'd hate me saying that, and then we've got a Charismatic preaching almost worship, so there's very few points in which they relate to one another, in the physical world, let alone online.

Researcher – What's your benefice like, in terms of traditionalist? I'm guessing it's a bit of a mix.

P1 – I think between the four of us, we're probably split between what form we use. You have to remember where you are as to which word to use. The expectations as well, it is like we're going to do a "Hymns and Pimms" event at my church, then the whole benefice wants to come, and suddenly the service that was going to be a very informal thing that I was leading is not a full-blown benefice Evensong, and that's not what's it's about, but it's been taken over because that's what they expect a service to be if you're going to have it at that time of day. It's Evensong. Ok! There are tensions like that. How a vicar goes around four parishes, meeting them, it's difficult really.

Researcher – Thank you all so much, that's more utterly than I hoped we could pull out. Is there anything that has come to mind while we've been talking that you've not had a chance to share, or would like to?

P2 - I think there's been, as far as I'm aware, no guidance centrally, at all, there is none. Which would have been quite helpful, not least in these days of vulnerable protection, to keep everyone safe.

P3 - And also, related to that, personal use of social media, and what might be appropriate, it doesn't matter when you've got an elderly congregation, but I know friends who are in city churches may be adding people on Facebook all the time, and people who are.. and there are questions about what might be appropriate or not appropriate in terms of that. I mean I personally don't have church friends or congregation, other than the person who does the pew sheet and the other works at York Minster, as friends, and I won't accept people as friends, but that's a personal choice, but there's not guidance.

P2 - No, there's not. I have a church Facebook account and a personal one. It's the only way I could do it because it's quite difficult. I have some friends from my past life that post things you really don't want to be seen. There's nothing wrong with it, from a personal perspective, but from a professional perspective, no.

P1 - Yes, there's my ex-university friends posted something and I thought "do I really want Bishop Paul to see that?"

P3 - Bishop Paul, there was a moral debate with Bishop Paul adding me as a friend, not that I don't mind being friends with Bishop Paul (*Everyone laughs*).

P2 - But I have posted something to everyone except Bishop Paul! (*Everyone laughs*).

Appendix 4

Email from P1, Friday 21st August 2015.

Being at Wydale last night I had more time for reflection on our discussion. I am currently reading "The Wounded Healer" by Henri Nouwen...

I was having difficulties last night articulating that worrying about my own doubts or abilities to get the "right" message across makes me reluctant to get into theological debates online. Then I read from Chapter 2, part 2 - Tomorrow's leader, section 1; The minister as the articulator of inner events: "The key word here is articulation..." "only he who is able to articulate his own experience can offer himself to others as a source of clarification."

That makes me think it's not just about theological confidence, it's being theologically articulate. And that's something I presume clergy are likely to be more confident with!

There was another paragraph in the same chapter..."The young especially do not have to run away from their fears and hopes but can see themselves in the face of the man who leads them." That got me thinking of how I relate to young people through Godly Play. In our wondering, I don't give answers - I wonder with them and facilitate their discussions. I have used Godly Play with the congregation and it has

gone down well - so perhaps my Facebook entries could be more like Godly Play wondering?

And one final thought from my husband, when I was discussing this with him: "It's the same for communications in any sphere - you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. People are always quick to criticise."

I enjoyed being part of the discussion last night; thank you for including me.